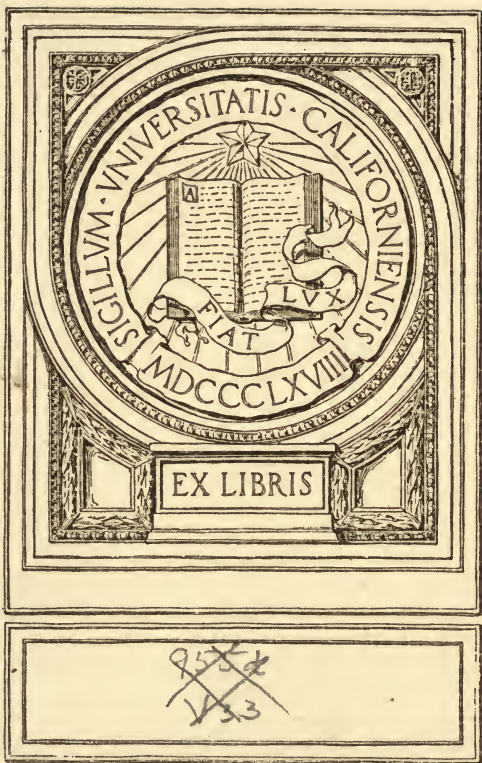


A GREAT MYSTERY SOLVED

A Continuation of Dickens'
"EDWIN DROOD"

GILLAN VASE



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BEING A CONTINUATION OF AND CONCLUSION TO
"THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD"
(THE UNFINISHED WORK OF CHARLES DICKENS)

BY
GILLAN VASE

EDITED BY
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EDITOR'S NOTE

THE fate of Edwin Drood, the last of Charles Dickens' creations, has exercised the minds of not a few literary men of eminence. The best of them could but guess ; and which has gone nearest will never be known. They were content to suggest the answer without troubling to work it out in detail as a continuation and finish of the story. This more difficult task was undertaken by "Gillan Vase," whose luxuriant imagination led her not only to follow up the destinies of the characters which we owe in their inception to Dickens, but also to create several others.

As rather detracting from the value of a sequel in which it seemed desirable that only known Dickensian characters should appear, these new ones have been eliminated. The completion of the original story, the spirit and diction of which are, it is thought, pretty closely imitated, is now offered as an ingenious and probable solution of the mystery.

"THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD"

(SUMMARISED)

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IN Cloisterham, an English Cathedral town, the Dean was the most important personage, though Mr. Sapsea, mayor and auctioneer of the city, had doubts on the point. By strangers the one might be mistaken for the other, Mr. Sapsea, in dress and dignity of bearing, paying Mr. Dean the compliment of the sincerest form of flattery. He was more clerical indeed than the clergy, and the monument he had raised to his late wife testified to some of the admirable qualities which in him inhered. The most charming little person the city could boast was Miss Rosa Bud, who was being harboured at the scholastic establishment of Miss Twinkleton, preparatory to her approaching marriage with Mr. Edwin Drood, to whom she had, in a sort of way, been betrothed almost since childhood. That rather supercilious young gentleman took the prospect of his future happiness very much as a matter of course, a lofty state of the adolescent masculine mind which the lad did not try to hide from his dour, if loving, uncle, Mr. John Jasper, a man only a few years older than he, the relationship notwithstanding, and choir-master of the Cathedral, his fine voice being not the least attractive part of the services. Within the Close lived the Reverend Septimus Crisparkle, a Minor

Canon, whose tiny, timid mother kept house for him there, and was as dainty as a little china shepherdess, a figure which she oddly suggested. Very proud was she of her seventh and only surviving son, and he, in his stalwart manhood, no less so of his frail little ma.

It takes all sorts to make a world, and in the small one of the Cathedral and its precincts Durdles, the drunken stonemason, was fairly conspicuous, with his dinner bundled into a handkerchief and carried about all day and every day. A satellite of his was Deputy, a hideous small lad employed at a common lodging-house, whom he had hired to pelt him home with stones in case he was out too late in his cups, the bargain being that first he was to have a "widdy widdy warning" in the form of some doggerel verse. Durdles always spoke of himself in the third person, and his hobby was to go about tapping tombs and walls with his hammer, the answering sound telling him many things dulled to less sensitive ears. Even in sleepy Cloisterham events out of the common would happen occasionally, such as the arrival from Ceylon of Neville and Helena Landless, brother and sister, orphaned and of neglected up-bringing, so that the girl was to go to Miss Twinkleton and the youth to Mr. Crisparkle, for the bettering of their education. Both were dark and remarkably handsome, and both had been hurt to the soul by the harsh treatment of a conscienceless step-father.

Edwin and Neville met, and a mutual dislike was not long in manifesting itself. The newcomer resented Drood's cavalier treatment of Rosa, with whom he himself was at sight in love. At a meeting brought about by John Jasper, with the avowed idea of a reconciliation, high words passed between the young fellows, and Neville drank more than was good for him. Jasper

maladroitly or maliciously foments the quarrel while trying to smooth it over. Neville flings the dregs of a glass of wine in Drood's face, and leaves the room in a rage, after Jasper has parted them. Later Mr. Crisparkle brings about the reconciliation between the two, and to mark it the choir-master for Christmas Eve invites them to supper. In his diary he has entered an account of the quarrel, which makes it look black against the passionate Neville. One night before Yuletide, Jasper gets Durdles to show him over the Cathedral, from the crypt to the top of the tower, by lantern light, for the satisfaction of his archæological bent. On their way thither they pass a mound of stuff which the choir-master is warned against treading on, as it is quicklime, which eats up anything brought into contact with it. Jasper has brought with him a bottle, which his companion is encouraged to pay attention to, and, nothing loath, the stonemason presently feels the need of “forty winks.” Jasper volunteers to stay by him while they are taken, but it happens that the clock is striking two in the morning when he is aroused, so that he must have slept a couple of hours. Before the evening of the supper, Rosa and Edwin have met and agreed that the idea of their marriage was a mistake. Let them be as brother and sister to each other.

Landless has it in mind to start off on a walking tour on Christmas Day, and to be away for a fortnight. He carries out the intention, but does not get far on his way when he is overtaken, surrounded and captured by a small body of men, after a struggle in which he uses his heavy stick freely and cracks a skull or two. The stupid fellows have given no intimation of the fact that they are not footpads but acting with authority,

as Edwin Drood has disappeared and foul play is suspected on the part of Neville, with whom he was last seen leaving Jasper's lodgings in the Gate House and going towards the tidal river that runs through Cloisterham. The sapient Mayor is half inclined to commit him to prison, but Mr. Crisparkle's indignant protest and his promise to be answerable for Neville's appearance when required bring saner counsel. Mr. Grewgious, a receiver and collector of rents, living and having his office in Staple Inn, London, is Rosa's guardian, and devoted to her for her dead mother's sake, whom he had loved and hoped to make his wife, but another man had been luckier than he, winning her. From him, widowed and on his death-bed, Mr. Grewgious had received her betrothal ring, and this he had given Edwin, with some fatherly advice on the seriousness of the step he and Rosa were about to take, a little while before they came to the decision that, in fact, it was too serious for them to venture on. He had been told of this, and hurrying down to Cloisterham on the news of Edwin's disappearance, he seeks out and informs Jasper of the broken engagement, whereupon the choir-master gasps, open-mouthed, and falls down in a fit. Grewgious suspects him of being in love with Rosa, and maybe of much worse. Meanwhile, diligent but vain search has been made for Edwin Drood's body; the people of Cloisterham have jumped to the illogical conclusion that Landless is guilty, and to avoid the torture of their accusing eyes, he and his sister move to London, taking up their quarters in Staple Inn, near Mr. Grewgious, another neighbour being a retired naval lieutenant, Mr. Tartar, between whom and Neville an acquaintance is struck up. Meanwhile, at Cloisterham, Jasper has

openly and violently declared his love to Rosa, who, greatly alarmed, flies to Mr. Grewgious for protection. He receives her with warm affection and comforting assurances of help and safeguard, puts her up for a night at Furnival's Inn Hotel, and presently establishes her in Bloomsbury lodgings, with Miss Twinkleton as chaperon, at a Mrs. Billickin's, a terror of a woman, as the school-mistress soon finds out. That Mr. Tartar feels a tender regard for the sweetly fascinating Miss Rosa Bud presently appears, as also that Crisparkle is in love with Helena Landless. At Cloisterham has arrived a Mr. Datchery, who takes up his residence at the Gate House, with Mrs. Tope, John Jasper's landlady. Whoever he may be, he is disguised by a shock of white hair and other means, and he has a habit of chalking on the inside of a cupboard door certain marks which indicate the progress he makes from day to day in the work of investigation into the Edwin Drood mystery.

The opening chapter of the book describes a scene in an East End opium den, from which a wreck of a man creeps in the early morning. It is kept by a hag who has listened without learning much to the mutterings of this customer, as he lies in a half stupor from the effects of the drug. The last chapter tells of a visit stealthily paid to this den by the choir-master, so that there is little doubt that he was the visitor of whom we read in the first. At this point the unfinished story halts.

S. B. JEVONS.

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CHAPTER I

TWO BREAKFASTS IN CLOISTERHAM

SERVICE is over—the early morning service in the old Cathedral of the ancient city of Cloisterham, and the few who have composed the small congregation are rapidly dispersing in various directions, when one of the Minor Canons, Mr. Crisparkle, stumbles over something lying crouched upon the ground at his feet ; and saving himself with a start from the imminent danger of falling forward on his face, nearly goes to the other extreme of falling on his back.

Now for one who prides himself—and with reason—on the keenness of his vision, such a mishap, barely averted, is trying, to say the least ; and when further aggravated by the cause, which grins up at you, delighted at your discomfiture, raising, at the same time, a stone threateningly, is very trying. The Minor Canon has a fine temper, but he says, sternly—

“ What are you doing here, and what do you mean by lying right in my way like that ? ”

“ What I’m a doin’ here ? ” says the ragged urchin, who calls himself Deputy ; “ a purty question that, for a clergyman and a minor canon ! Hain’t I as much right to go to the Kinfreederal as you yourself ? What do you *mean* by a falling over me, and a kickin’ my shins, without so much as a widdy warning ? I’m man-servant in attendance on Her Royal ’Ighness, the Princess Puffer, and I’m a waiting here fur to conduct her ’ome.”

And Deputy, sharp-eyed and fleet of foot, slips past Mr. Crisparkle, and disappears round a corner, where a miserably-attired and trembling old woman has preceded him.

Mr. Crisparkle, in the course of a few minutes, arrives at the cosy home, upon the threshold of which he is accustomed to throw away all disagreeable thoughts. There he calls up a smile to his lips, assumes his usually elastic tread, and, humming a portion of the anthem so beautifully sung that morning by Mr. Jasper, the choir-master, and his choir, softly opens the dining-room door, whereupon his nose is welcomed by a mixture of Mocha, rasher and chop perfume, deliciously blended ; and he himself by a charming little old lady, daintily attired as a china shepherdess, and radiant to behold. After an affectionate salutation of her, he sits down and attacks his breakfast with a good appetite. She watches him for a while, and then says—

“ Septimus, tell me what has happened to vex you ; for that something has, even my old eyes are still sharp enough to see. You brought a load upon your heart home from London. You took that load with you to the Cathedral, and you haven’t left it there, in spite of your singing and your brisk step. From your earliest infancy, your mind was always an open book for me ; don’t, don’t shut it now.”

Here the old lady’s voice falters, and the tears rise to her bright eyes. A short pause, and the son slowly and hesitatingly speaks—

“ You may be sure that you would be the first I should open my heart to on any and every occasion ; and if on this one point I have kept it closed, it is because, unfortunately, you and I differ very much about it.”

The old lady rises, rings the bell, paces up and down the room in a hurried and nervous manner while the neat maid-servant clears away the things. Then,

drawing a chair close to her son, and seating herself, she fixes her bright eyes keenly upon his troubled face, and speaks to this effect—

“ Now that the plunge is made, and the ice broken, Sept, let me hear the whole. I don’t agree with you, and I tell you so beforehand ; I do differ from you, and you may as well know it to begin with ; but your troubles are my troubles, and your fears and anxieties must be mine, too. You have been to see Mr. Neville ? ”

“ I have, ma.”

“ And you visit him every time you go to London ? ”

“ Certainly I do,” says the Minor Canon, and his troubled face becomes suddenly illuminated with a proud, exultant smile, which vanishes, however, immediately, though not before the anxious, scrutinising eyes of his mother have seized upon it and stored it up for future and careful examination. “ Certainly, ma ; it is all I can do for him now, poor fellow ! But you must not imagine that my troubled thoughts came from him. It would, indeed, be impossible to meet him and his sister unmoved ; to see how patiently they bear an affliction, so great, so terrible, that it would be no wonder if they sank under it. I often preach them patience and endurance, but I do not believe, put to the proof, I myself should practise the half of it. To think of their being driven away, outcasts from the only friends who love them ; watched, and harassed, and threatened darkly by a foe, who will not meet them face to face. And to bear all this and be innocent—for, upon my soul, the lad is innocent !—is it not enough to drive them to despair ? And yet, all the gold in that boy’s nature is being ten times refined in the fiery furnace of affliction, and as for his sister——”

Here a radiant smile appears on the lips of the Minor Canon, and brightens his eyes ; but it is lost on his mother, whose own eyes are cast down and clouded by thickly-falling tears. She quickly wipes them away,

and not to expose herself to the bare supposition of having changed her mind, says—

“Then what is the reason of your being so sad and troubled and so unlike yourself, since it is not that?”

“A horrible suspicion has sprung up in my mind; a suspicion so horrible that, without proof to confirm it, it would be a sin to utter it, even to you. It seems a sin to have conceived it, and yet it suddenly came to me, almost like an inspiration, and having come, seemed to be the result of reasoning, which my mind had been carrying on unconsciously for months. God grant I may be wrong,” adds the Minor Canon, rising and shaking himself, as if to be rid of these melancholy thoughts. Then, catching a glimpse of his mother’s anxious face—

“I must take a run in the fresh air. You see I have my fits, as well as other people; but I know a cure—a fresh air cure. I shall come back in half an hour as fresh as a bee, ‘gathering honey from every opening flower.’”

Humming cheerfully, to complete the metaphor, the Rev. Septimus is in full trot, leaving her looking wistfully after him from the doorstep.

* * * *

The Very Revd. the Dean was both surprised and perplexed, though, as he declared to Mrs. Dean—

“Not quite so surprised, as perplexed, perplexed. For, my dear, how are we in so short a time, to find a substitute? And even with time before us, such a choir-master is not so easily to be found again; such voice! such expression! so attentive too, and punctual in attendance—in short, in every respect so unexceptional. A sad calamity for a man, though, a very sad calamity!”

Now that the Dean comes to think of it, he is not surprised at all that Mr. Jasper should wish to give up his situation as choir-master, and go to London.

He had declared that he could not remain any longer in Cloisterham ; the very air he breathed there, every note he sung there, every corner in the town, and every nook in the Cathedral, reminded him—here he had choked and become deadly pale ; but the Dean had understood him ; yes, the Dean had understood him perfectly, and had felt for him deeply ; poor man ! poor man ! His salary was not the object to him it had been ; the lawyer from London had communicated with him, and informed him that certain moneys, which would have been handed over to his lost nephew on his coming of age—the words brought out in a spasmodic way, and with the same deadly paleness—were at his disposal, as the only near relative. He had begged the Dean as a personal favour to supply his place as soon as possible, and of course the Dean could not refuse him ; though, as he said before, “ he was grieved to part with him, grieved and perplexed.”

Thus the Dean, sitting cosily with Mrs. Dean, in the cool of the evening, in the verandah at the back of the Deanery, and speaking in that tone of lazy, cheerful discontent, becoming and natural to an after-dinner Dean ; with such a glorious vista before him of sunny peaches and apricots, and mellowing plums, and blushing apples, in such quantity and quality as only were to be found in that Deanery garden, hidden from profane eyes by high walls, and only accessible to the favoured few, who were honoured in Cloisterham by the general and significant title of “ those who visited at the Deanery.” Thus the Dean, and the opinions expressed by him on this occasion, were echoed that same evening through all Cloisterham. Every one related it to somebody else, and though occasional variations were observable, the echo remained pretty faithful to its original. All had felt sure that he would not and could not remain. He had taken the loss of his nephew too much to heart, poor fellow ! he was quite an altered

man since then. Always still and reserved, he had become so much stiller, and so much more reserved, that his voice was seldom heard except in the choir.

"He had grown as thin as a skeleton," said tearful Mrs. Tope, relating the news to her lodger, Mr. Datchery, who took little notice of it, remarking indifferently—

"What did it matter to a buffer, whether this or that master led the choir," but supper being over, and Mrs. Tope departed, he added one thick stroke to his reckoning behind the door, and then taking up his hat, strolled out into the Cathedral Close. It was already dark, and light was shining out from the Gate House window, so that Mr. Datchery could distinctly see the figure of a man passing to and fro inside,—Mr. Jasper, doubtless, perhaps already making preparations for departure. With a perplexed face, Mr. Datchery watched him, until aroused by feeling something hit him from behind. Turning round sharply, he became aware of Deputy, who was dancing behind him in great glee, and exclaimed, angrily—

"Ah, you young vagabond, are you going to make a mark for your stones of me. You had better leave off that game, I can tell you."

"'Ere's a row," said Deputy, "just because I give you one as a widdy warning. I want's to speak to you, and I don't want for 'im to hear," shaking his fist angrily in the direction of the shadow on the blind. "I've been a watchin' of 'im for the last arf-a-hour, while I've been a waitin' for you, and now you comes a rowin' and a scandalizin' of me like that. It's 'arrowin' to the feelin's of a chap," said Deputy, rubbing both dirty eyes with his dirty fists, and pretending to be bitterly hurt, while all the while, he sharply scanned Mr. Datchery between his fingers, and mentally calculated how much he might get out of him.

"Come, come," said Mr. Datchery, good-humouredly, "out with it, Winks, what have you got

to tell me ? A shilling will make us good friends again, will it not ? ”

“ A ’arf-a-crown,” whimpered Deputy, “ I’ve injered my ’ealth a findin’ of it out. ’Er Royal ’Ighness is confounded hard to badger. I’d tried every dodge and a’most given it up. I told her she reminded me of my dead and gone mother, who died o’ whisky, after ’avin’ nearly broke every bone of my body (this for the private information of Mr. Datchery) and that I’d come and see her in London. She didn’t rise to that fly at all. I didn’t remind her of her dead and gone son, and she didn’t receive no wisitors, except in a business way.”

“ Well, well,” put in Mr. Datchery, impatiently, “ did you find it out at last ? ”

“ Wait a bit,” continued Winks, “ you’re a comin’ to it a deal faster than I did. I was dead beat, and, afeared you’d come too short this time, Dick, but when she set out to walk back to the station, all mumblin’ and totterin’, I made up my mind not to lose the last chance, and follered her.”

“ Hoping to hitch it out of her on the road, eh, Winks ? ”

“ At a conwenient distance,” went on Deputy, gravely, “ lookin’ out for the chance of pickin’ of it up ; a mindful of my promise and a reckonin’ on your gratitood.”

“ Not in vain, Winks, old boy ! ” said Mr. Datchery with a laugh, “ I’m an inquisitive old buffer, and I’ve got the means of gratifying my curiosity ; the woman interests me ; I’ve a notion of making a call upon her, when I go up to town ; she seems one of the right sort for mixing the opium pipe, and for a buffer who’s nothing on earth to do, anything that turns up is a godsend.”

Winks, who during these few remarks had been profusely illustrating his name, now put his thumb to his nose, and widened his fingers towards his friend,

with every sign of contempt and derision ; then, with a laugh, which seemed to proceed from his stomach, his mouth being totally unaffected by it, he replied—

“ Don’t take no trouble to waste none of your chaff on me, Dick, for I sees through yer as through a winder-pane.”

“ Bless my soul ! ” exclaimed Mr. Datchery, angrily, “ what an offshoot of the devil it is ! Why don’t you tell me what I want to know ? I know you found out at last, and it don’t matter to you *why* I want to know.”

“ She got so tottery on her pins,” pursued Winks, with immovable gravity, “ that at last she broke down on a stone by the road, and began to cough and to spit quite dreadful ; then she closed her eyes and fell to mumblin’. Creepin’ up to her, I says, soft like, ‘ where am I to come to, mother dear, when I wants a pipe ? You’ve clean forgot to tell me that, and without it, you know, I shall have to go to Jack Chinaman.’ I’d heer’d her mumblin’ some’at about Jack Chinaman, and so I said it at a wenture. Lor ! she were quite lively in a moment. ‘ Don’t go to Jack Chinaman, deary,’ she says, ‘ cause he’s much dearer than I am, and he don’t know neither the right mixin’ of it as I do ; come to me, deary ; to Mother Coombs in Purgatory Court, No. 162, down by the river.’ She kept on a mumblin’ and a coughin’, but I didn’t wait to hear no more, and there’s your answer, Dick, and now fork out my arf-a-crown.”

“ There it is, and now be off with you,” said Mr. Datchery. “ I’ve something to do before night, and I must have time to do it in. Stay,” he added suddenly, “ you may still help me. Watch that man there till I come back, and if he leaves the house, you follow him, and find out where he goes. You may earn another shilling to-night, Winks, if you are sharp, and more shillings in the future ; you understand ? ”

Deputy gave a significant and quick sign of com-

prehension and assent, and shook one dirty fist again in the direction of the shadow. In the other was closely clenched his half-a-crown ; yet, between his defiant growls for Mr. Jasper, and his congratulatory chuckles for himself, he did not fail to observe that Mr. Datchery, behind him, was copying his actions with even increased vehemence. Indeed, this latter gentleman seemed, for some unaccountable reason, to be stepping completely out of his *role* of easy-going buffer, and to take a keen and curious interest in the actions of the shadow, who, in bodily form, called himself John Jasper, choir-master.

And John Jasper, the threatened ; John Jasper, the regretted ; John Jasper, the indispensable—late professor of music in the ancient city of Cloisterham, and leader of the Cathedral choir—what of him ? If the devil had not been dancing before his house that evening, he had most surely been present in its interior, standing in almost palpable form beside its wretched inmate, and pointing, with a shadowy hand, to the reckoning that would not balance. Had he not been trying to add it up all that evening, and many a weary evening and day before, and yet, when it seemed nearly finished, only one figure or so more, something had turned it all wrong, and he must begin again at the beginning. How weary he was ! How heavy his head ! How heavy his heart ! Ha ! was that the devil who laughed ? He *had* a heart ; how it throbbed and beat passionately for love of her—or hatred, which was it ? Once he had loved her, how well he remembered that. How, all the week, he had but one thought, one longing, for the hour when he could sit by her side, touch her hand, sometimes even her little foot. How often it came upon the wrong pedal, and then, was it not his duty to put it right ? Such a careless little thing, and he such a careful master !

He could praise her, correct her, scold her ; anything, *everything*, to make her lift her bright eyes,

whether in anger or content. How long he had cherished the hope that she returned his love, when the saucy naughtiness with which she treated her music-master—Eddy's uncle—had changed into a steady, childish gravity, not unmixed with fear. How often he had seen her meet his eyes with a look of recognition in them—recognition of what?—of his love, or of her acknowledgment of it? How, at this time, when he touched her hand by accident, or in performance of his duty as her music-master, instead of the pretty, naughty pettishness she had formerly shown, she would draw it away with a shudder, as if in fear, and the bright colour would flush her face, even to the roots of her waving hair. Was not that the working of the troubled conscience that reproached her for treachery to her betrothed? Was not that almost a proof that she returned his love? And, even though the last interview he had had with her had shown him his error in this respect, had revealed to him, so distinctly that miscomprehension was impossible, her shuddering abhorrence of him, could he give her up? No!—a thousand times, No!—a million times, No! No devil in hell, no God in heaven, should make him leave her to another!

Smiting himself upon the breast, anon cursing himself and cursing her, anon pressing her picture passionately to his heart, so the wretched man passed the slow hours of the weary night.

Deputy and Mr. Datchery, always on the watch, saw the light, the steady light, ever burning in the Gate House. The grey morning peeping in, revealed a motionless form, haggard and worn out with watching and passion. Finally, Mrs. Tope, all bustle and broom and duster, coming in, was "that shocked" at beholding her honoured Mr. Jasper so prostrate, that, as she afterwards said, you might have knocked her down with a feather.

"Lord, ha' mercy on us!" was her first terrified

exclamation, then, prompt in action, she had assisted Mr. Jasper to his easy chair, and was moistening his pale forehead with water, before he had time to become fully conscious of her presence. "There, there!" said the good woman, patting him as if he were a baby, "you are coming round nicely now; a few drops of wine will set you all right again," and hastening to a small sideboard behind the door, she poured out a glass of strong wine and held it to his lips. A faint colour flushed his face, and, with a slight motion of his hand, he indicated the open boxes and things scattered about, as if to account for his condition.

But Mrs. Tope—bless her heart!—knew all about it, and her busy woman's tongue was already supplying all deficiencies in his explanation.

"Lord bless you, sir, *I* know! what with a packin' up, and what with a thinkin' of Mr. Edwin, it's been too much for you. Tope, he'll bear me witness, that only last night I said to him, 'Tope,' says I, 'I'll bet you all the money in the parish boxes, and something more—for there ain't much in 'em—that not one-half an eye does Mr. Jasper close this live-long night.' It ain't no wonder either, for a sweeter young gentleman, or a kinder, never lived, and many's the tear I've shed, as Tope will certify to, for him and for you, sir; but, if you'll excuse my takin' the liberty for to say it, we must all try not to fret and worry ourselves too much, even when the trouble's very hard to bear. It ain't no mortal use, the grave will never give up its dead."

What was that, glancing out sinister from the half-closed eyes of the pale occupant of the easy chair? What devil was that, hissing and triumphantly repeating her last words, "the grave will never give up its dead?" Whatever it was, it was gone again in a moment, sinking back into the darkness whence it had sprung, and leaving no trace of its presence behind. Mrs. Tope could have sworn she had seen

and heard it one moment, and the next, almost doubted her own senses. It stopped her chatter, however, and left her staring with foolish, wide-open eyes at the motionless figure opposite her.

"You are very kind and sympathising," said the choir-master feebly, "and I trust and rely on your affection and fidelity to me in all things; but this is a topic upon which I cannot trust myself to speak; the wound is still too new; it hurts too much," and, covering his eyes with his long, thin hand, he sank back in his easy chair, while Mrs. Tope, a little rebuffed and a little piqued at first, speedily recovered her spirits in the exercise of her household duties.

The room became brighter, healthier, freer. Even Mr. Jasper, not insensible to the cheerful influence, let fall the hand shadowing his eyes, and smiled grateful acknowledgment at the verger's wife.

Presently, out of the small kitchen below, issued a savoury odour; coffee perfumed the atmosphere; a snowy cloth decked the table; plate and cup and saucer, and brightly polished knives contributed their part to the completion of a cheerful whole. In a word, and in an incredibly short time, breakfast, neat and dainty, was laid. Before beginning on it, he motioned Mrs. Tope to take the vacant chair beside him.

"Just this once," he pleaded, as she modestly hesitated, "for the first and perhaps the last time, good Mrs. Tope. You have waited upon me so often, and now that the place which has known me so well will soon know me no more, I cannot take my last meal alone. You have a few minutes to spare, have you not?"

"As for that," said Mrs. Tope, "nothing should have induced me to go, sir, until I had seen you take a few mouthfuls; for it frightened me terrible when I first came in, to see you lying there so still and white; and I couldn't answer it to my conscience to go away

and you not fully restored ; so if you wishes it, and orders me to sit myself beside you, then I will take the liberty, sir, and many thanks for your goodness ; and I hope, after all, that you will change your mind and come back to us ; for it's a lone place is London, sir, for a lone man, and we shall miss you here sorely, particularly in the Cathedral."

Thus the verger's wife, casting anxious glances from time to time at the choir-master, who, reviving a little under the influence of the warm and savoury morsels, smiled back at her.

Meanwhile, Mr. Datchery, packed and ready, awaited impatiently the return of Mrs. Tope, in order to inform her that a letter he had received that morning summoned him peremptorily to London ; a distant relation, lying dangerously ill, having demanded, in terms impossible to refuse, his presence there ; and to pour into her sympathising ears his bitter complaint of what a fatality it was for a single buffer, who denied and utterly abjured all family ties, and who had so completely found his nook in life, where he could hang up his hat for the remainder of his days and live in peace and quietude, to be compelled, positively compelled, again to face the world he hated, and to bore himself with matters which could be of no possible interest to him.

Meanwhile, Deputy, munching a crust, his frugal breakfast, in a corner, and occasionally, with half an eye, making a mark of some early passer by, watched with keen intelligence the door of the Gate House, ready on the faintest sign of movement on the part of its inmate, to report to his friend and ally.

Breakfast over in the Gate House—the two having eaten little, Mr. Jasper being still too feeble and too engrossed with anxious thought, while Mrs. Tope's modesty prevented her doing justice to her usually healthy appetite—the verger's wife packed the port-manteau, which the choir-master had decided on taking

with him, and received his instructions concerning the rest of his worldly goods in Cloisterham. Then the two sallied forth, Mr. Jasper propping himself on Mrs. Tope's strong arm, and proceeded in the direction of the coach which was to convey him to the station. Mr. Crisparkle, having said good-bye to his mother, and heartily saluted her on both rosy cheeks, soon overtook them, and releasing Mrs. Tope, good-naturedly offered his arm to Jasper ; but he avoided all unnecessary conversation with him, and fell into so meditative a mood, that the choir-master, furtively watching him, became every moment stiller and sterner. Finally, Mr. Datchery, with his hat in his hand, his snowy locks waving in the gentle breeze, and accompanied by Winks, brought up the rear ; but at a convenient distance, where they could neither be seen nor heard by the two before them. Thus the three arrived at the omnibus and took their places. Jasper first, kindly assisted by Mr. Crisparkle, who, however, did not take the seat beside him but at the other end of the vehicle ; then, Mr. Datchery, cunningly assisted by Deputy, who, with a volley of oaths and a volley of stones, thrown indiscriminately in every direction, let him slip unobserved into the seat by the driver, Joe, who nodded his honest head in comprehension of the situation. Then a mild expostulation from Mr. Crisparkle, a half muttered curse between Jasper's clenched teeth, a crack of Joe's whip, a strong pull from the horses, a cloud of dust—Deputy becoming gradually a mere speck in the distance—and rattle, rattle towards the great city, whither they were all bound.

CHAPTER II

MR. GREWGIOUS'S NEW CLERK

MR. GREWGIOUS, in his solitary chambers in Staple Inn, sipping a cup of coffee after a late dinner, and sipping it in no very enviable frame of mind, has had a trying day. He is feeling deeply that he is getting too old for change, and yet change has been forced upon him—come upon him, as he says to himself, disconsolately, like a clap of thunder from a cloudless sky.

For, however unpleasant it may be, in some points of view, to have a clerk who, intellectually, is immeasurably your superior, and who never hesitates to force the conviction of this fact down your reluctant throat—a bitter tonic for your humility; however inconvenient it may be to have a clerk, so liable to wander into the mazes of fancy and lose himself there as to be never up to the point of poking his own fire, and therefore virtually compelling you to perform that office for him; however harrowing to the feelings it may be, to have a clerk so sunk in melancholy and clogged by the weight of a Tragedy which no one will buy of him, that it is a matter of hard work to hoist him to the surface of everyday life, when he is wanted there; yet all these evils, like all other evils to which mankind is subject, become comparatively easy to bear, from usage.

Not that Mr. Grewgious has had a want of applicants for the post vacated by his late clerk, Bazzard; no, indeed! that would have been a blessing, compared to the dread reality. Ever since he had been so unfortunate as to make his want known in the "Times,"

crowds of applicants for the vacant place have been invading the quiet of Staple Inn, and making it as noisy as the noisy streets outside, with the echo of their footsteps. The frightened sparrows, scared from their search for crumbs below, fly dismayed to sheltering roof and chimney, looking down with ruffled feathers, cocked heads, and bright attentive eyes, upon the unwonted scene ; and the husky door-bell of Mr. Grewgious's chambers, breaking down under this unprecedented demand upon its strength, grows dumb and voiceless. Poor Mr. Grewgious himself—clerkless, and only assisted by a temporary boy who is usually absent, occupied in a vain attempt to bring down a sparrow, when the force of the invaders is numerically strongest—is quite knocked off his legs by the constant running to and fro, and what is worse, knocked off his balance too.

Aged clerks have presented themselves, with snowy heads and scanty locks, and faces, more pinched, perhaps, from want, than from old Time himself ; and youthful clerks, with rosy health upon their beardless cheeks. Mysterious clerks, with untold horrors in their hollow eyes ; and ingenuous clerks, with gaudy flowers in their buttonholes ; dismal clerks, with long-drawn whining voices and heart-rending sighs ; and cheerful clerks, one broad grin from ear to ear ; come-down-in-the-world clerks, with a sort of faded and shabby gentility about them still ; and coming-up-in-the-world clerks, with a smack of the errand-boy upon them yet ; fast clerks, in at the door and out again, before one could cry " Jack Robinson " ; and slow clerks, impossible to be got rid of when once there. Distracting clerks, one and all, to worried Mr. Grewgious, who is most thankful to get rid of each in turn, and who, in a worse dilemma than at the first, has finally placed the temporary boy behind the outer door with strict injunctions to let no one in, and has retired, worn-out and disconsolate, to his inner

sanctuary, to brood over the vicissitudes of human life, and to rest a little from the toils and labours of that trying day.

Is that a rap on the door? Now heaven be merciful to the ears of that temporary boy, for Mr. Grewgious, who has never administered a box on the ear in his life, has vowed to make his first experiment in that way on them, and to make it with a vengeance.

Incapable of rising to the emergency by doubly bolting and barricading the door to keep out the intruder, Mr. Grewgious utters his customary "come in," and succumbs to his feelings in an easy chair, into which he sinks, a prey to despair, as a tall figure shows itself upon the threshold.

"Bless my soul!" he murmurs, "if it ain't *another*!"

Another comes in with a low bow.

"Their name is Legion," groans Mr. Grewgious, adding aloud with the resignation of utter despair, "Take a seat, sir."

The new comer seating himself, and still remaining silent, Mr. Grewgious continues—

"You are come, I presume, in answer to the advertisement?"

A low bow again. An old young man, or a young old man?—Mr. Grewgious' short-sighted eyes cannot make out which. A man of about middle height; thin and scared looking; with black beard and whiskers; and hair dark as night. A pale man, with something weird and mysterious about him like a spectre, and whose eyes, hidden behind a massive pair of blue spectacles, are all the more open to terrible suspicion on that account. A voiceless man, sitting still in the chair, into which he had sunk on Mr. Grewgious' invitation, and in which he remains motionless, with his glazed eyes fixed upon that exhausted gentleman, freezing him.

"This is getting alarming," thinks Mr. Grewgious, "and I'm on the wrong side for the bell. Besides,

that boy is sure not to be at his post. But boys will be boys," he adds, as his anger ebbs fast, "I was a boy once myself, and remember perfectly how it hurt me to have my ears boxed, and how they burned afterwards. I'll lay it on gently, only as a matter of warning." Then aloud, "Do you wish to confer with me on any subject, sir?"

"You are seeking a clerk?"

"Unfortunately," says Mr. Grewgious, "I am." He is greatly relieved to hear the mysterious stranger speak; for, exhausted as he is, his imagination has been conjuring up in him a ghostly visitor.

"I am come to offer myself as a candidate for the place."

"Very good!" responds Mr. Grewgious, wishing that he hadn't.

"I beg you to try me."

There is a curious roughness in the voice as if the speaker were struggling with tears, and as if the issue of the struggle were doubtful. But after a pause, he goes on again—

"I am poor, and without friends. I am exceedingly anxious to get work to do because, if I cannot, I must beg or starve, and to beg I am ashamed. But I will work—work night and day, if you wish it; and you shall pay me for that work not one penny more than you decide that it is worth."

Although staggered by this address, so unusual, so wholly different from anything said by the fifty-odd applicants who have been besieging his rooms and altering the chronic aspect of Staple Inn all that day, and touched by the pathos and apparent sincerity of the speaker, and by something else—a something undefinable, but which makes the strange figure, and the broken voice seem not altogether unfamiliar—though why familiar, or where, he cannot tell—Mr. Grewgious is, nevertheless, far too versed in the ways of the world and its hypocrisies to show for the present

anything more than his strict business side to the stranger. He inquires, therefore, more drily than ever—

“What is your name, sir?”

“Brandis. Robert Brandis, at your service.”

“Are you young,” continues Mr. Grewgious, screwing up his eyes in an earnest endeavour to penetrate the blue spectacles, and unscrewing them again, as wise as he was before, “or middle-aged, or old?”

“I am young, sir; young in years, though trouble has aged me.”

“Humph!” exclaims Mr. Grewgious, smoothing his head in some perturbation of spirit; for good sense and good feeling are pointing in opposite directions, and he cannot make up his mind which to follow. Then, abruptly—“Have you anything the matter with your eyes? I wear spectacles myself, sometimes, on account of my short sight; but not blue ones. I cannot say,” viewing these articles with strong disfavour, and speaking more sharply than he would have done but for the conflict within, “that I consider them an improvement. Not at all.”

“I wear them, sir, because I must. They do not interfere with my seeing all it is necessary for me to see.”

“Very likely,” thinks Mr. Grewgious, “but they interfere with your being seen, and that’s what I want to do. Can you write a good, clear, legible hand?” inquires Mr. Grewgious further, in a hard and severe tone. For common good sense is slowly yielding to the attack of uncommon kindly feeling, and Mr. Grewgious is half-angry with himself for his own weakness, as he knows the world will call it.

“Let me show you, sir.” He turns to a table, upon which writing materials are lying, and writes his name in full. There is no manner of objection to be made to the handwriting. It will do.

“Have you any notion of bookkeeping?”

“ Not much, sir, as yet ; but I will learn, in my spare hours, if I have any. In a very short time, I will learn. I am a good arithmetician. Do not let that be an obstacle.”

“ That shall be no obstacle,” says Mr. Grewgious, feeling strangely drawn towards, and at the same time strangely repelled by this individual with the blue spectacles, “ just as if,” he says to himself, “ I were a hard old bit of iron, which I very likely am, and he a magnet, continually changing poles.”

“ So far, all being satisfactory,” continues Mr. Grewgious, who has been stroking his head to bring that too, if possible, to a satisfactory degree of smoothness, though apparently without the wished-for result, for he still looks perplexed and dissatisfied, “ there only remains the business form of consulting your testimonials. May I trouble you for them ? ”

The result of this very natural question is a startling one. The stranger springs to his feet ; and approaches Mr. Grewgious with a passionate gesture.

“ Have I not told you,” he says, “ that I have none ? Have I not said that I am a stranger in the city—in the country itself, and that I have no acquaintance or friend to speak a word in my favour ? Painful family affairs, which have tainted me although I am innocent, have forced me to begin life again, and to begin it at the foot of the ladder. You are a good and kind-hearted man, sir. I feel it. I have heard others say so. Do not send me away on that account, as others have done over and over again. For, sir, the devil is always close at hand to tempt desperate men, and there *is* such a thing as desperation, there *is* such a condition as despair.”

The repulsive power of the magnet is strongly brought to bear upon Mr. Grewgious during this speech, and makes him turn a cold ear to the passionate appeal. For he can read no confirmation of its truth in the eyes of the speaker. Their cold, glassy covering baffles all

his efforts to penetrate it, and he draws back stiffly, to say, drily and coldly—

“That is all very well, though hardly a business way of going to work, and may be true, *may* be. I have no right to doubt it, but I am a remarkably unimaginative man, and I find it difficult to bring any imagination to bear upon such a case. It is, however, excuse me, so unusual for a young man to have attained your age, and attained it blamelessly, without being able to produce any one, personally or by letter, to testify to that fact, that, as a well-wisher, I should advise you to lose no time in endeavouring to hunt up some one to perform that friendly office for you. I should indeed, should indeed.”

“That is impossible,” answers the stranger, burying his agitated face in his trembling hands, and the tone of his voice strikes cold on the warm heart of the old man, for it is a tone of anguish. Then, after a pause, he raises his head again, to make one last effort.

“Oh, sir, can you not feel that I am honest? Can you not hear that I am only longing for work; and willing and wishful to perform that work to the best of my ability? Is there no possibility of my getting anything to do without testimonials? Is it utterly hopeless to think of obtaining work without a character?”

“As a man of business,” answers Mr. Grewgious, clearing his voice, which is getting husky, and smoothing his smooth head again, “I should say it is. As a man acquainted with the ways of the world, and its customs, and its requirements, as a rule, I should say decidedly yes!”

“Then may God save me, and protect me from evil,” says the young man, taking his hat, “and help me, if it be possible, to find some one who thinks differently. I *have* heard, casually heard, you spoken of as a kind-hearted, benevolent man, and that gave me courage to come to you. Otherwise, I would never have

crossed your threshold ; otherwise, I would have gone to the world's end, rather than have risked what I *have* risked in coming here to-night. Not that I blame you ; you are acting, no doubt, according to your lights. God help me now, for there is no help in man ! ”

Uttering these last words under his breath, more to himself than to his hearer, he turns hurriedly to go—would have been gone in another moment, but that Mr. Grewgious, in whose benevolent heart his last words seem to ring like a knell, crossing the room with an agility utterly unexpected in him, lays a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

“ Wait a bit ; wait a bit ! ” he pants, out of breath, “ and sit down again. We haven't done with one another yet. Who told you I didn't mean to try you ? Not I, I am sure. Why, you are like a Jack-in-the-box (I had one given me once, when I was a little lad, and it was the terror of my childhood), springing out like mad, when one never means or expects him. We business men are not accustomed to making contracts in a hurry ; and I, in particular, am so remarkably slow in my decisions, that without sufficient time I can decide on nothing. Bless my soul ! I'm all of a tremble still with the effort of stopping you. Give me time, my good fellow, give me time.”

With his blue spectacles all awry, and his hat falling from his trembling hand ; with his lips quivering, and the tears he had kept back with such difficulty during the interview falling thick and fast, the young man sinks into the chair again, opposite Mr. Grewgious, who is blowing his nose with a trumpet-sound.

“ I was just upon the point of saying,” begins Mr. Grewgious, speaking very slowly and distinctly, as if he fears his voice may turn traitor, and let out something he wishes to conceal, “ that I didn't object to give you a trial, contrary to custom, even without a character, when you broke into what may be termed

the Emotional. Being myself a man born without emotions, or, at any rate, with emotions in so rarefied a state that they never expose me to the risk of an explosion, it is naturally mortifying and trying to my feelings to see people meandering into entirely un-business-like paths where I cannot follow 'em. You took a by-path, sir, in entering into the Emotional, and I beg you to return to me now into the broad highroad of Common Sense."

How hard and dry are the words the old man utters ; and his voice, hard and dry, too, chimes in unison. Yet his eyes, screwed together so tightly, are not screwed this time only to enable his short sight to reach further. And when he again attacks his nose, and brings forth a renewal of the trumpet-sound, he turns aside his head to make use of his handkerchief for another and more secret purpose.

"Your duties would not be heavy," he resumes, "and though naturally hard (I was born so) I trust you would not find me an unjust master. Your salary, I will pay you monthly for the present (it is more convenient to me), a month in advance. If you are unprovided with lodgings, there are some nice ones not far from here which are to be had. The lady who keeps them—a most remarkable female of the name of Billickin—has begged me to remember that they are empty, and to help her to fill them. But that, of course, rests with you," continues Mr. Grewgious, remembering, with some alarm, that a sojourn with that lady is not without its drawbacks. "Though she might take more kindly to a male than to a female," he thinks.

The stranger, who can hardly speak for tears, thanks him fervently.

"It is a pleasant custom (among heathens) in ratifying a contract," says Mr. Grewgious, "to break bread over it. My coffee is cold, but my boy shall run over to Furnival's for a fresh supply. Not that we

are heathens, I trust ; or that coffee is bread, or anything like it (though we may have a morsel to eat along with it, for I'm as hungry, myself, as a wolf), but I'm the most unfortunate man in the world at a simile, and invariably break down when I attempt one ; and it may answer the same purpose, perhaps."

Mr. Grewgious, during these remarks, has been guilty of the rudeness of turning his back upon the stranger, and has been studiously contemplating indifferent objects in the room with a sudden interest in them which demands all the short sight with which Nature has provided him, for the young man has broken into low sobs, and is vainly struggling to compose himself. To give the stranger further time and opportunity, Mr. Grewgious shuffles out of the room ; and on his return the young man has (to use Mr. Grewgious' own words) emerged from the by-paths of the Emotional, and come out into the broad, high road of Common Sense.

In with Mr. Grewgious, or rather, close upon the heels of that gentleman, comes a waiter from Furnivals' with the smoking coffee, and the " bit of eatable," which promptitude on the part of said waiter is so approved of by Mr. Grewgious that he rewards it on the spot with a piece of silver.

" Really," he remarks, rubbing his hands complacently, " this will be quite a cheerful family tea, to which I've long been a stranger—only it ain't tea, and we ain't a family—but that's like me. Draw up to the table, my good sir, and let's begin, for I'm absolutely starving. My dinner must have gone all the wrong way, on account of the worry I've been in, for I'm sure I don't know what's become of it. Dear me ! it's just occurred to me that perhaps you don't like coffee."

" Oh, yes, I do, sir."

" Well, that's a blessing ! Now let me try and pour out for you, and if I don't make it to your liking, pray

mention it, and I shall be extremely obliged to you. I'm such a remarkably helpless man, and so little used to pouring out anything for anybody except myself—and I'm nobody—that I'm almost sure to bungle. Here's cream, here's sugar, here's (holding it close, to make out what) something I can't specify, but it's something to eat, and very nice, I dare say. Now, do try it. I shall feel personally flattered if you like it."

Handing all these things to his guest, and pressing them upon him, as if he had got the notion into his head that he must be on the point of perishing from starvation, Mr. Grewgious, in spite of his protestations of hunger, touches not a morsel, nor imbibes a drop, until he has seen his visitor fully occupied.

"And now," says Mr. Grewgious, "to return to the subject of your qualifications. There's one question I must ask you, which I almost forgot, though it's a most important one—can you poke a fire?"

Smiling for the first time during the interview, the young man answers with some surprise at the question—

"I hope so, sir. Are you very particular about the manner of doing it?"

"No, it isn't that. Every human individual, I do believe, has his own particular way of poking a fire; I've got my way, and I dare say you have yours. But I mean, whether you are liable to forget to do it?"

"If I should be so foolish, sir, I should have to suffer the penalty; but I do not think my memory is so short."

"Why, you see," says Mr. Grewgious, smoothing his head somewhat dejectedly, "I had a clerk—alas! I have him no more!—who, being a genius, and a writer of tragedies, couldn't be expected, you know (and I didn't expect it, I am sure) to think of such a thing

as a fire, and, every day a'most, his fire used to go out."

"He couldn't have been so liable to take cold as I, then, or he would have remembered to replenish it for his own sake."

"Not liable to take cold! Bless you! he was liable to take it to a most extraordinary degree. Cold in the head, cold on the chest, cold in the stomach, cold running to rheumatism, or to a cough, or to seed and becoming chronic. It makes me hot to think in how many dreadful forms cold used to attack and prostrate him."

The stranger, not knowing what to say to this, yet conscious that Mr. Grewgious' eyes are emphatically demanding a comment, says, with an expression of surprise and concern—

"Indeed!"

"Of course I felt it my bounden duty not to let the unfortunate young man, so highly talented, fall a prey to cold of any kind on my premises," continues Mr. Grewgious. "I therefore took upon myself to attend to his fire, privately, and without letting him know of my intention. But, unfortunately, I am as liable to forget as he is to take cold, particularly when engrossed in my accounts, and the pangs of conscience I have suffered, when he would hint severely—as he did, sometimes—that cold might turn to inflammation, and inflammation might carry him off in a winking, and that then I should have to bear, not only his loss—which, naturally, would be hard upon me—but the whole weight of his inflamed blood and unfinished tragedies upon my luckless head."

There is a sort of twinkle in Mr. Grewgious' eye at this juncture which rather modifies the tragic solemnity of his words, but it disappears, as he goes on again.

"Now, I am a remarkably wooden man, and stiff in the joints, and indisposed to be much in motion ;

therefore, as a precautionary measure, I always had his fire made up in the morning very big indeed ; but as if possessed by a demoniacal desire to worry me, or perhaps out of pure disgust at finding itself looked upon so coldly by Mr. Bazzard (that's the name), that fire had an almost unnatural propensity for going out. I used to hear him cough or sneeze (a most terrific sneeze, shaking Staple Inn like a small earthquake), and, rushing in frantically (which last I beg to be considered a figure of speech, it being impossible for me to rush), I always found that fire dead or dying.

" You have no idea," goes on Mr. Grewgious, after a short break in his narration in order to replenish his visitor's cup and plate, in spite of the protestations of that satiated person ; " you can have no idea of the bitter reproaches I used to make myself. In imagination—also a figure of speech, for I haven't any—I saw myself and my name, until yet respectable, branded by indignant contemporaries, and basely defrauded posterity, on account of having been an active agent, or rather inactive one (it may be difficult to understand me, for I am getting into deep waters, and can't swim), in the premature extinguishing of a bright and shining light. I feel his loss, and mine, immensely."

" Why did he leave you ? " enquires the stranger, while Mr. Grewgious gulps down his coffee (cold) with as lively an expression of enjoyment as his unfinished features could express, smacking his lips afterwards.

" Ah, that's the best part of the story ; and the only thing which reconciles me to my deprivation. His father, a rough, uneducated, unappreciative, remarkably prejudiced man, who couldn't be got to see what a treasure he possessed in a son who composed tragedies and who, in short, was so opposed to 'em that a hint of their existence brought on blood to the head which had to be taken from him in quarts, kept my poor fellow so short of money that he couldn't bring out his masterpiece—in confidence, ' A Thorn ! '

—and even threatened to cut him off with a shilling, if he ever heard another word about it. But (it was a judgment, no doubt) he was cut off himself in the midst of his prejudiced career, knocked into the other world by a stroke which he couldn't avert and which prevented him from carrying out his unnatural intention, for ever."

"Violence or apoplexy?" enquires the stranger.

"Apoplexy," says Mr. Grewgious, with solemnity, gently and apologetically shaking his head, as if death were a thing to be disapproved of in the abstract, but that here there were extenuating circumstances. "Blood to the head, you know. He was always subject to it, and there was no one on the spot to draw it off in quarts. Dear, dear! such is life! You should have seen my Genius, when he came to tell me the news."

"He was, no doubt, terribly cast down?"

"Cast down!" says Mr. Grewgious. "Not a bit. Picked up, he was, my poor fellow. He had been cast down enough before. There was no mistake about the money. A small annuity for his mother, a trifle for his sisters, and all the rest of it for the tragedies. You may imagine my feelings when he told me that it was his intention to dedicate his next to me!"

The stranger is understood to murmur that "that was only what you might expect from so very remarkable a clerk."

"Only think of that, to *me*!" continues Mr. Grewgious, complacently. "Only fancy my figuring in a book! Why, if I shut my eyes, I can almost see it: 'Dedicated to my friend, Mr. Hiram Grewgious, Receiver of Rents, of Staple Inn, Holborn; who, in a humble way, always did his best to preserve my life for a grateful country.'"

The stranger, smiling, thinks it would not be like that.

"No? Don't you really?" says Mr. Grewgious,

seemingly disappointed. "Well, I dare say you are right. I am a remarkably unimaginative man, and have so little acquaintance with the flowery paths of literature, and so clear a conviction that I should cut the poorest of poor figures there, that perhaps it may be as well if he forgets it. What, you ain't going, are you?"

"It is very late, sir, nearly ten; and I fear to weary you."

"A gentlemanly way of telling me that I have wearied you to death," says Mr. Grewgious, smiling; "I've been jabbering and chattering like a lean magpie, or—or—a female. Well, I won't detain you, for you look pale and tired."

Mr. Grewgious screws up his eyes very tight to watch the stranger draw on his gloves and take his hat, but the mysterious spectacles baffle all his efforts to make out more. Bold, hard, impenetrable, these glassy foreposts effectually hinder him from seeing what he seeks to see; and he finally smooths his head resignedly.

"When do you wish me to come to you, sir?"

"If you can manage to come to-morrow or, at any rate, as soon as possible, I shall be glad; for I have at present only a temporary boy" (Mr. Grewgious is again sensible of a pang, as he remembers the painful duty before him), "who helps me mostly, by trying to rid Staple Inn of its sparrows, and the sooner the better for me."

"The sooner the better for me too, sir. I will come to-morrow."

"And here," says Mr. Grewgious, who has been fumbling in his pockets, "here is the first monthly payment."

He is so painfully conscious of the unbusiness nature of this act, that he has drawn out with the purse his pocket-handkerchief, and now noisily applies it to his nose.

But his confusion is as nothing compared to that

of the stranger. With a violent rush of colour, that might have been shame, to his pallid face, and with a convulsed lip, as if he were keeping back by force a rush of words as violent which struggled to free themselves, he faintly raises a deprecatory hand; then, as if yielding to fate stronger than his will, he accepts the money.

“It would be useless to make further assurances,” he says, “but may God bless you, sir, and help me to serve you as you deserve to be served.”

Mr. Grewgious, accompanying his newly-engaged substitute for the never-to-be-forgotten Bazzard, lets him out. Waiting to see him cross Staple Inn, and pass out of the gateway, which the porter opens for the purpose, he falls into a short reverie, smoothing his smooth head perplexedly; then, turning, goes back slowly and meditatively to his solitary apartment.

A fancy which has been vaguely haunting him all through the interview and which now, as he sits exhausted in his easy chair, assumes gigantic proportions, troubles him.

“What is it,” he thinks, “in this stranger, upon whom I have never set eyes before, to my knowledge, which has kept reminding me all the evening of the dead lad in his unknown grave? It is not his height, or figure, for this man is taller and thinner. It is not the colour of his hair, for young Drood’s was brown, and his dark as night. It is not his face, for the lost boy’s was as bright and fresh as a fine morning in May, and his sombre and pallid, like that of a man risen from the grave. It is not his eyes, for I could see nothing of them through those hideous spectacles. It is his voice, perhaps; yet I cannot tell, for it seems an indignity and insult to the dead boy to compare the two, one of which was as clear as the fresh song of the blackbird, while the other sounds as mournful and tuneless as the cry of that bird of night and mystery—the owl.”

He rises to light his evening lamp, and let down his blind, but still the merciless thoughts haunt and worry him, refuse to be satisfied with his concession, show no sympathy with the weariness of his body, and clamorously demand an audience. His head is bowed and his face is sorely troubled, as he listens perforce to what they insist on saying.

"I was hard with him that last time, too hard I fear, yet God knows I only meant to do my duty. How his colour changed, and his lip quivered, as I—and who am I, to presume to set myself up as judge in such a matter?—gave him my uncalled for, and, perhaps, mistaken notion of what a true lover ought to feel. Yet I do not think I was mistaken; I do not think I was."

His head is bowed still lower, and his mien is still sadder and more dejected when the next thought begins.

"I wonder if I shall ever see *her* ring again! Ah me, who can tell me where it may now be lying! Shall I succeed in finding it? If I do, I shall find out something else besides; something to which I have dedicated my life. For I charged him by the living and by the dead, to bring back that ring to me, if it were not placed on Rosa's finger; and I know, I know, that he would have done it if he had lived. Shall I see the day when I shall have hunted down the murderer, and avenged the lad's death? When I do, something tells me I shall find her ring again."

The next thought comes with a burst, rushing to the attack.

"I do *not* repent what I have done, for the dead lad's sake. What a strange quiver and thrill there was in his voice, as he asked me if I could not feel and hear that he was honest. I think I could; I do not repent what I have done, and I am sure I shall not sleep the worse for it to-night."

CHAPTER III

INSIDE THE BILLICKIN'S

SOME very warm contentions between Miss Twinkleton and the Billickin, which had resulted, as usual, in the utter discomfiture of the former, though nothing would have induced her to admit it, had so oppressed little Rosa on the hot summer day, that her girlish face, looking disconsolately out upon the neighbours from the open window of the best parlour, had an expression of care which would have troubled her guardian—had he been there to see it—to the depths of his honest heart. The announcement that Mr. Crisparkle had called was heard with joy. He came forward gaily as she entered, holding out both hands to greet her; and at the sight of his honest, kindly face, a great sob rose up chokingly in the throat of the solitary girl, and tears she could not repress rose to her eyes, sparkling there like jewels in the light of her welcoming smile.

“Oh, Mr. Crisparkle, how glad I am to see you! You come like a breath of fresh country air, after the close dullness of this great weary city. And how is Mrs. Crisparkle, and everybody else in dear old Cloisterham? Ah, how long the time has seemed since I ran away from it! and how much I should like to go back again, if—if——”

As she faltered and hesitated, dreading to give utterance to the hated name, the Minor Canon, keenly watching her troubled face, saw how grave and even sad its expression had become.

There was a shadow, as of pain, under the dark eyes, which gave them a depth and womanly earnestness,

strange and new to them ; the small mouth, slightly lowered at the corners—not peevishly, but sadly—was irresolute and nervous, and the childish roundness of the cheeks had lengthened into a more perfect oval. Yet so innocent and childlike still were the sweet face and wistful eyes, that Mr. Crisparkle had to remind himself that the little creature before him was a woman now, and a child no longer, or he would have been tempted to take the innocent face between his strong man's hands and kiss away the trouble settling there.

“ I have come to talk to you about that,” he began gravely. “ There is no need, dear Miss Bud, for you to remain away from Cloisterham any longer on *his* account, for he has given up his situation there, and gone away for good. Another music-master has already taken his place, and leads the choir in our venerable Cathedral.”

Rosa's cheek had blanched a little as the Minor Canon referred to the dreaded man, and she drew involuntarily closer to him, as if for protection ; but the clergyman could not ascertain whether the horrible suspicion which haunted him raised any echo in her breast.

The fear and abhorrence which overcame her even at the mention of that man might merely be the result of his unreturned and terrible love for her, and nothing more. Yet her shrewd perception had come to a conclusion and settled in her mind the true state of things, while his was still wandering in darkness.

But that she feared even to think of the horrors of the past, she might, perhaps, have spoken ; but womanly pride and womanly terror kept her lips closed, and the mystery that had gathered so darkly round the lost boy, must remain a mystery until man's patient search and patient watching had found the clue.

Mr. Crisparkle spoke no word and gave no sign. Yet he, too, set himself on the side of the watchers—

watching and waiting till the time of disclosure should come.

"Oh, I am quite forgetting Miss Twinkleton," suddenly exclaimed Rosa, recalled to a sense of the trust reposed in her. "We must go upstairs at once, Mr. Crisparkle. She will be fidgetting herself to skin and bone as to what has become of me, and who else is here alone with me in the back parlour. Oh, dear me!" said Rosa, with dimpling cheeks, and tossing back her bright hair, "what a fuss poor dear Miss Twinkleton will be in!"

"Let us at once relieve her anxiety," said the gallant Minor Canon, smiling, though not without a prick of conscience at having forgotten to enquire for that estimable lady. "My motto, and I hope my practice is, never to keep a lady waiting."

And yet, as he followed the sedate little maiden, with that shower of soft, wavy hair, he was mentally calculating how much weariness it might have taken to have so quickly subdued her childish impetuosity and to have ripened her so speedily into a woman.

"No need to enquire after your health, Miss Twinkleton, for, as I see, you are blooming wonderfully here in London, casting us poor country folks quite into shadow."

"You find me, sir," rejoined Miss Twinkleton, in whose virgin breast the venomous arrows cast by the Billickin still rankled, "in a state of mind not calculated, according to my poor opinion, to renovate or invigorate the body. And the flush you observe on my countenance," she continued, with some sharpness, "is by no means occasioned—as you seem to imagine—by robust health, but is rather the natural and inevitable result of the daily conflict which I have to maintain with the person of the house."

Now it happened that in acknowledging this fact, which her dignity would have sought to ignore—for can a philosopher stoop to dispute with his laundress,

or a prince with his valet ?—Miss Twinkleton's feelings ran away with her discretion, as has occurred once or twice, perhaps, to others before her, therefore becoming suddenly aware that she had somewhat betrayed her weakness, she coloured still more deeply, bit her lips a little savagely, and fanned herself more energetically than ever.

Rather discomfited, for he could not but see that he had roughened the way, instead of smoothing it, the Minor Canon inwardly and wisely determined never again to pay a compliment without being sure of its being well received beforehand. He was then understood to remark, that colour, like many other things, was often deceptive, and while expressing his sympathy with the lady's sufferings, offered himself as her champion against the offending landlady, with somewhat superfluous energy.

But his assurances were brought to an untimely end by Rosa's clear laugh which, ringing through the room and out into the hot, sunshiny street, sounded, for the moment, almost as merry and lighthearted as in the old days at Cloisterham. She was imagining the Revd. Septimus Crisparkle, Minor Canon in Cloisterham, in a wordy conflict with the Billickin—the vigour of the onset, and the completeness of the defeat.

Rosa's clear laugh was so infectious, that the Minor Canon caught it on the spot, in spite of Miss Twinkleton's antidotal nods, and waves of the hand ; he was so glad to see sunshine again in the girl's sorrowful face. Miss Twinkleton sat smileless, in sedate and offended dignity, waving them back into propriety again.

"It is in very bad taste, my dear," she said, with severity, addressing Rosa, but glancing sideways at the abashed Minor Canon, who hung his head far more like a frightened schoolgirl than did Rosa, who didn't seem to mind it much, "to burst out into a fit of laugh-

ter, without beforehand explaining the reason why. It is always unladylike to laugh loudly ; a gentle smile is the utmost in which a gentlewoman should indulge, and then only when the example is given her. To laugh, and particularly to laugh loudly, is decidedly vulgar, and shows a lamentable want of refinement."

During the delivery of this homily, Miss Twinkleton seemed to be recovering her lost spirits amazingly ; and the sight of the prostrate Minor Canon proved so complete a balsam for her wounded self-esteem, that she became quite preceptorially gay.

" Why, I might have thought," she said quite good humouredly, though with the manner of one to whom the notion of such audacity never could really have occurred, " that you were laughing at me."

This so nearly set Rosa off again, that only the sight of the distressed Minor Canon prevented a fresh burst. She hastened to come to his rescue and explain.

" Don't be angry, dear Miss Twinkleton. You know I always was a silly thing, and I could not help thinking how funny it would be to see Mr. Crisparkle and Mrs. Billickin in a discussion, for you know, he would have the worst of it in next to no time."

" So I had better not try," said the Minor Canon, " but keep clear of this formidable woman. There are times when discretion is the better part of valour. And you can't knock a woman down after all, however much she may deserve it ; even if knocking down were, under any circumstances, consistent with my cloth."

" No," said Rosa, " but she might knock you down, and when she had, oh, how she would trample on you, and buffet you ! She doesn't know what mercy means, and her only notion of a fallen adversary is, that she has him more completely in her power."

" You make my flesh creep."

" Then you will have some sympathy with our sufferings, and some notion of what we have been enduring," said Rosa, mischievously glancing at Miss

Twinkleton, upon whose intellectual brow the scattered shadows had returned since the mention of the landlady's baleful name. "But, hush! I hear her on the stairs."

The sudden glance of terror which Miss Twinkleton cast at the door, was so spontaneous and involuntary, that it spoke volumes. This excellent instructress of youth, so formidable in the eyes of defaulting members of the Nuns' House, conscious of unlearned lessons; or tart crumbs in their beds; or of stray glances cast during church service towards some member of the masculine half of youth in the sanctuary, had evidently found more than her match in the Billickin. Fortunately the alarm was a false one. It was only the housemaid with a letter; but it set Miss Twinkleton to vindicating her character, and clearing herself from the barest suspicion of cowardice.

"I am sure," she said, after a pause, during which she affected to be examining the post mark on the letter, but in reality was composing her agitated countenance, which still showed an untoward propensity to twitch, "that Mr. Crisparkle will not suppose me to be capable of entertaining that weak and unworthy sentiment, denominated fear, of a person so far removed from me in the social scale, and whose feeble imper tinences, which Rosa much exaggerates, I could, if I would, crush instantaneously (Mr. Crisparkle caught himself wondering why she wouldn't). We are not afraid," continued Miss Twinkleton, in a sprightlier tone, "of a mosquito or a gnat, though it stings; but we do not expose ourselves voluntarily to their tiny instruments of torture."

Mr. Crisparkle was eagerly about to adduce various experiences of his own in this respect, and to relate anecdotes of times and seasons when he had been stung by both mosquitoes and gnats. He was even going further to explain that some naturalists were of opinion that the only difference between these two small plagues

was a difference of climate—when Miss Twinkleton waved him into silence again. It was astounding how ill at ease the Minor Canon felt, and with what difficulty appropriate words rose to his tongue, but it was a peculiarity of this excellent lady speedily to reduce gentlemen to this condition, and bring down their opinion of themselves to a minimum.

“My position in Cloisterham ought to be a guarantee, and I hope is, that I know how to maintain my authority, and uphold my dignity under all circumstances,” continued Miss Twinkleton, extremely anxious to re-establish herself in his opinion. “The young ladies in my establishment, although invariably treated with the most judicious kindness (which does not consist in pampering their foolish fancies) and discreet indulgence, when they have committed any little fault or indiscretion, tremble in my presence; not from fear of correction, but at the glance of my reproving eye.”

It was well for naughty Rosa, that that self-same eye was severely directed towards the opposite houses, and heedless of her, for she was wickedly gesticulating with an imaginary rod right before the nose of the Minor Canon, who was coughing suspiciously behind his open hand. But when Miss Twinkleton looked round, before continuing, they were both regarding her with grave and respectful attention.

“The domestics employed in my institution are accustomed implicitly to obey my directions with a reverence not unmixed with awe; the masters accommodate themselves invariably to my regulations, and testify for me on all occasions a deep and heartfelt respect. One master, a Frenchman, said ‘it made him shiver to look at me’; naturally, on those occasions, when his native levity had caused him to depart from that staid and sober deportment which my regulations direct. I am confident,” concluded Miss Twinkleton, looking at the Minor Canon with a frigid

challenge to contradict her if he dared, and causing him, particularly in the small of the back, to participate in the sentiment of the Frenchman, "that you do not doubt my ability to cope with the person of the house, if I should choose to abase myself to the effort."

Mr. Crisparkle's frosty condition thawed a little under the warmth of his assurances that he did not. He seemed willing to assert this, and stick to it, in the face of a contradictory world.

"Therefore," continued Miss Twinkleton, in a milder tone, "the resolution which I have already communicated to Rosa, and which now I repeat to you, to the effect that we must change our place of abode, is not occasioned by puerile cowardice, or fear of any human being whatever, still less of the upstart person of the house. But mosquitoes bite and gnats sting," said Miss Twinkleton, returning to her former simile with the smile of a gentlewoman, "and instead of crushing these creatures—which, no doubt, have their usefulness in the all-wise order of things—let us go to a place where they are not."

"Why, that is odd," said Mr. Crisparkle, "or rather, even, for it fits in with a plan of mine exactly, or, I should say, with a plan of ma's. I came specially to make a proposal this afternoon, about something ma has set her heart on."

He glanced at Rosa as he spoke. The childish burst of gaiety was over, leaving the sadness, which had re-settled on the young face, all the more apparent after it. She was sitting looking listlessly out of the window, with an expression of profound weariness. Mr. Crisparkle's face grew a shade less cheerful as he enquired if Miss Twinkleton meant to go back to Cloisterham at once?

"No, reverend sir. A fortnight's rest from toil still remains to us; a fortnight's pause before resuming those arduous labours which, though dear, often weigh heavily upon us—poor, yet proud, educators

of our sex. You find me, now that the flush has faded, pale. You find Rosa pale. I have thought of spending these few fleeting days at the sea-side. I have thought of Brighton, if Mr. Grewgious should approve. The sea breeze will give us back our faded roses. Strengthened in body, invigorated in soul, we then return to Cloisterham."

Miss Twinkleton was not particularly referring to Rosa when she used the word "we," which she did in an editorial sort of way, and as an enhancement of her personal dignity. Satisfied, apparently, that she had sufficiently asserted herself, and proved her invincibility, she now appeared in a new and startling light, wherein she seemed to the alarmed Minor Canon still more appalling, and under the influence of which he grew hot, instead of shivery.

"Ah, dear sir!" she said, letting her faded blue eyes rest upon him, with a shade of sadness, "believe me, there are times when we poor, maligned educators of our sex—forced into the position by a stern destiny—would gladly indulge in those little weaknesses which other women have so large a right to enjoy; there are times (after school hours, and in the privacy of our own apartments) when we would gladly lay down our arms and become weak. For the improvement of our own sex we learn to suffer and be strong. But, alas! strength is apt to be viewed by you gentlemen as an unwomanly attribute in the fair sex. Weakness is, after all, our only available weapon in contending with *you*."

With a sigh, half too real, half sentimentally called into being for the occasion, Miss Twinkleton looked dreamily out of the open window, as if wondering if ever, or how soon, her implacable destiny would allow her to make use of that formidable weakness for the destruction of the male portion of mankind in general, and of Minor Canons in particular; while he began to feel that it was high time he should go.

"I think your plan of removing to Brighton for the next fortnight," he said, "is an excellent one; and I feel almost sure that Mr. Grewgious will consent to it on behalf of his ward. But a fortnight is soon over, and then—and that is the question which brought me here to-day—what is to become of Miss Bud?"

"I have thought of that. Of all my pupils, no one has ever had so strong a hold on my affections as the orphan child who knew no other home than mine. I never thought of her quitting it but for the home and heart of her affianced husband. The terrible fate which has separated them has upset all our plans for her future; but the time will come when some one else will find out the attractions of my pretty one; and time, too, will heal her sorrows, and prepare her to accept another. Until such time, let her, if she will, return with me to the Nuns' House; not as a pupil, of course, but as a beloved and cherished young friend. Rosa, my love, I am proposing to Mr. Crisparkle that you should come and live with me for the present at the Nuns' House. Would you like to do so?"

With a loving, grateful gesture Rosa took Miss Twinkleton's hand, and pressed it to her lips, but her wistful eyes were turned towards Mr. Crisparkle, beseeching him to give utterance to the negative, which her loving lips hesitated to pronounce. He understood and hastened to her assistance.

"I was going to beg you, dear madam," he began, "to allow Miss Bud to accompany me to Mr. Grewgious on a little matter of business, and we will lay your kind offer before his consideration. I have a proposal to make on my own account too, or, as I should say, on ma's, and the decision must rest, of course, with him, as Miss Bud's guardian."

Miss Twinkleton giving her gracious permission to this, Rosa withdrew to make ready, returning in a few minutes looking so sweet and fair that the Revd. Septimus would have been hardly a man had he not

secretly congratulated himself on his good fortune in being permitted to escort so charming a girl. And when she slipped her little hand within his arm, as a matter of course, and they passed out together into the hot and dusty street, his complacency was at its height.

CHAPTER IV

A SELFISH PROPOSAL

"THAT is a very excellent lady!" said the Minor Canon, gravely, as he and Rosa paced the dusty streets together.

"And I love her dearly," responded Rosebud, raising her face wistfully to Mr. Crisparkle's, "she has always been a kind and true friend to me."

Having thus relieved their somewhat burdened conscience, the two relapsed into silence. That part of Holborn through which they were passing was thronged with people, seeking towards evening that which the hot and thunderous atmosphere of the day had failed to yield them, a breath of cooling air. Dust lay thick everywhere, upon the hot and stifling houses, with windows and doors wide open, as if they, too, were panting for fresh air; upon the burning pavement, where the heated and irritated passers-by jostled and crowded one another; upon the pale faced, peevish children, dragging back reluctantly from the hands which led them; upon the perspiring shopmen, who having nothing else to do, peered out of every available opening, perhaps speculating upon the chance of some stray breeze, fresh from the river, or from the still more distant ocean, having lost its way and wandered there; upon the rattling omnibuses, empty inside, but doubly piled up without; upon the foaming horses, bathed in sweat; upon the suffering passengers, grumbling and grimy; upon the tarts and jellies at the confectioners, where it struggled for the supremacy with myriads of gorging and gluttonous flies; upon

the ices, even in the short interval between their being made and consumed ; upon the sturdy policemen at the corners of the streets ; even upon Rosa's pretty bonnet, and the Minor Canon's own clerical black suit, which on the road had turned to iron-grey. Every whiff or faint apology for a breeze brought the inevitable dust along with it ; every rattle of the piled-up omnibuses and the jaded cabs showered it upon the crowd. Gritty, grindy, dusty High Holborn, defied even the watermen with their watering barrels, and laughed to scorn every attempt to make it other than it was. Very glad indeed was Mr. Crisparkle to get his charge safely out of this highly-populated Sahara into the comparatively cool oasis of Staple Inn.

Coming out of the gateway as they entered was a man, so white-faced and sombre, so shadow-like and spectral, that Rosa passing him, uttered a little cry. Strange to say, this cry was repeated, echoed by the man himself. Perhaps she had startled him ; perhaps something else was agitating him, for he staggered heavily and would have fallen but that Mr. Crisparkle's strong arm caught and held him.

Strange to see, this sombre man, without a word of thanks, without a syllable of acknowledgment, or explanation, almost wrenched himself from the Minor Canon's strong support, and covering his face, went his way. He walked so unsteadily and falteringly, that the Minor Canon, who had turned in surprise to watch him, thought he would have fallen again, but he kept on and never looked back. Then the Revd. Septimus, turning to Rosa, saw that she too was deadly pale, tremblingly clinging to his arm.

"The man frightened you," he said. "No wonder. He must have been drunk."

"It was like a ghost," she answered, shivering, and added under her breath, "like the ghost of Eddy !"

"This is a most unexpected pleasure," so Mr. Grewgious welcomed them, "and to what most fortun-

ate combination of circumstances am I indebted for it? I was sitting here, after a hard day's work, in a state of melt—if so hard-favoured a man as I am may be allowed to participate in the general condition of humanity, on this tropical occasion—and my mind reverted, naturally reverted, to my ward, to my charming ward, who occupies so much, nay, nearly all, of my leisure opportunities for thought, but I never imagined her so near."

Rosa raised his hard hand to her soft lips, with a pretty apologetic expression in her still agitated face.

"My dear," responded Mr. Grewgious, "my hand hardly knows how to deport itself under so much honour. Really," he continued, viewing that member with admiration, as if her gentle kiss had transformed it into pure gold, or sparkling diamonds, "you must never do that again, my dear, you really must not; for my hand would then, I feel sure, refuse ever to work, on plea of having become ennobled.

Rosa smiling at this, and Mr. Crisparkle laughing heartily, Mr. Grewgious came back to a sense of his responsibility as host.

"Sit down, my dear," he said, "and take off your hat, and we will consider what refreshment would be most suitable to the occasion. Would you like a glass of lemonade or iced champagne; or would you prefer anything else whatever?"

Rosa wanted nothing; they were come on business; at least Mr. Crisparkle had said so.

"But business, my dear," expostulated Mr. Grewgious, "is so very dry a subject, particularly for a young lady, that it will be absolutely necessary to moisten it with something. My clerk, my new clerk, who has come in the place of Mr. Bazzard, is just gone home—you must almost have met him, I should think—or I could have asked *him* to run over to Furnival's, though now I come to consider it, I really do not think I should have liked to do so, he is so much the gentle-

man. Bazzard was a gentleman too, there is no doubt about that, of course, a gentleman and a genius; but this one is so much more the gentleman, that perhaps it is fortunate that he is gone; for, on consideration, I really should not like to have asked him. So if you will excuse me for a moment, and I *shall* only be a moment, I assure you, then I will go myself."

Suiting the action to the word, and before they had time to stop him, he was gone, bareheaded; and before they had time to think about his being gone, was back again.

"There," he exclaimed, panting, seating himself with much deliberation in his easy chair, and mopping energetically the huge drops of moisture from his face; "there, my dear, what do you say to that, for an angular man? Why, it's the lovely presence in my room which oils my bones, lubricates my stiff joints, and makes me active and alert as a lad in his teens. Furnival's are most attentive, and will be here directly, my love, with your iced champagne, and while you are cooling yourself with that, we—my reverend friend and myself—will cool ourselves with something heavier."

"You are too kind," said the Revd. Septimus, smiling, "and I feel quite ashamed to give you so much trouble, and to have given Miss Bud so much trouble on this hot, dusty day, to hear only, after all, a selfish proposal of mine."

"Selfish!" echoed Mr. Grewgious, thoughtfully, "that would be quite new and quite unexpected, coming from you, reverend sir; would it not, my dear?"

Rosa nodded, though in an absent sort of way, and sipped iced champagne which, in the meantime, had arrived, accompanied by something heavier for the gentlemen.

Mr. Grewgious eyed his ward thoughtfully through

his mopping fingers, and eyed her again still more thoughtfully, during the cooling process with something heavier, for there was a look upon her face which he did not like to see there.

“And now,” continued Mr. Grewgious, after a short pause, during which they all sipped, or watched the dusty sparrows hopping about disconsolately on the dusty pavement, and seeking vainly something cool, or something green; “now, reverend sir, if you are feeling somewhat better, and my ward is refreshed, why, I am too, and we might begin either with that little piece of business you spoke of, or with the *selfish* proposal you are about to make.”

With a strong emphasis on the word, and with a twinkling eye, or as nearly one as he could make it, directed towards Rosa, Mr. Grewgious endeavoured jocosely to draw her into the conversation; but her bright eyes remaining fixed intently upon the sparkling wine, Mr. Grewgious’ eye lost its twinkle, and he mopped himself again profusely, and somewhat dejectedly.

Mr. Crisparkle commenced by relating all that had lately happened in Cloisterham; dwelling particularly upon the fact that Mr. Jasper had resigned his situation there, and had taken up his abode for the present in London.

“I came up with him yesterday morning,” continued the clergyman, “though not for the pleasure of his company; and before that ma and I had a long talk together. You know, Mr. Grewgious, that unfortunately ma does not quite agree with us in some particulars, but though ma’s judgment may be wrong sometimes, her heart never is, and when I mentioned it, ma was quite taken with it directly, and begged me to lose no time in coming up and speaking to you about it; and ma hopes, and I hope, that you will agree to it, and that Miss Bud may approve of it, which would make us very happy.”

"I have no doubt whatever," interposed Mr. Grewgious, "that we should and shall, when we know what 'it' is; and as we are, figuratively, sitting upon thorns to hear it—though it does not become me to attempt comparisons; for what do I know about figures, except those in my counting-books, and as for thorns, I have had enough of them to last me my lifetime, without introducing 'em uncalled for—I am sure we shall both agree in begging you to bring 'it' out as soon as quite convenient."

Casting a cheerful glance at his ward, and encountering only a downcast and troubled little face, Mr. Grewgious shook his head remonstratingly; and then, apparently fearing it had become terribly ruffled, smoothed it the wrong way so energetically that, if at all electric, it must have emitted sparks of fire.

"And ma thinks, and I think," continued Mr. Crisparkle, who was far too much in earnest with his subject to notice the perturbation of Mr. Grewgious or the silence of his ward, "since that dreadful man has left Cloisterham, and as Miss Bud is accustomed to Cloisterham, and was happy there, and as we know that you are still undecided as to where she shall go at the end of the holidays, that if you approved, and she approved, she might come to us."

Mr. Grewgious, brightening, again looked at Rosa, who, very pale, and with a doubtful, pondering look, and anxious and knitted little brow, seemed so absorbed in her own thoughts as to be hardly conscious of their presence, and even yet gave no response.

"As far as I am concerned," said Mr. Grewgious, with troubled earnestness, "I thank you gratefully; as far as my ward is concerned, I should have thought that such a proposal would have met with her certain and full approbation; but she is silent. She may have formed other plans for herself, which it will be our duty carefully to consider, and to weigh thoroughly. My ward is silent—let her speak."

“Minor Canon Corner,” continued Mr. Crisparkle, still cheerfully, though with a very perceptible fall in his voice, “is a quiet spot. I have never found it dull; but a young lady has other wishes and other wants than mine, and a home inhabited by an old lady and a middle-aged clergyman may be—nay, perhaps, must be—dull, and have too little brightness for her. Nevertheless, I must say, in justice to myself, that ma and I had not forgotten this, and had planned a hundred little plans to make it brighter, and as Miss Bud would have been near her old home, and among her old friends, we thought it might have met with her approbation. I may say also, I hope, for myself, and I am sure I may say for ma, that we would have done our poor utmost to make her happy.”

Both gentlemen now looked at Rosa. Feeling that, perhaps, or struck by the sudden silence, she started, changed colour, and, looking back at them with wide wondering eyes, came to herself and to a knowledge of where she was.

“What was it you said?” she asked, pressing a bewildered and trembling little hand to her head. “I was so lost in thought that I did not quite understand you.”

“Mr. Crisparkle, my love,” began Mr. Grewgious, “has proposed your returning to Cloisterham and taking up your abode for the present in his house. I am free to confess that my mind has been seeking anxiously a suitable home for you, and has come to no result. Mr. Crisparkle’s offer—so kind and generous—has lightened my heart of a load. Nevertheless, the decision rests with you, my dear. If you have formed any other wish, if you have made any other plan, or, simply if you have any objection to make to this, mention it freely.”

“And do not let any consideration for me, or any consideration for ma,” put in the Revd. Septimus, his honest face glowing from the eagerness with which

he spoke, "influence you in the very least ; for, though, of course, there is plenty of selfishness in our wishing to secure so much brightness for our quiet home, yet that has not been our only motive either ; and though I left ma wandering from room to room, uncertain which you would like best, and in a state of bewildered delight at the prospect of having, as it were, a little daughter to care for, yet we would not for a moment wish to induce you to act in opposition to any scheme you may have planned, or urge you——."

"But you will let me thank you, will you not ?" said Rosa, rising, and putting both her hands into those of the delighted clergyman, "and you will let me tell you that if I could have my choice of all the happy homes in happy England, there is not one—there is not one—that I would choose in preference to yours."

Mr. Grewgious' puckered face smoothing of its own accord at this, he considered the occasion propitious for smoothing his head again, and did so (this time the right way) accordingly.

"And if," continued Rosa, with tears in her eyes, "if one who, until now, has only been a trouble and an anxiety to all about her ; who till now has only been able to repay with love and affection—and not always with enough of that—those who have been kind to her, dare make assurances, then take hers that she will try to be a comfort, and not a trouble only, to her kind friends ; and do her very best to make them never regret having taken her in."

The Revd. Septimus opening his mouth here to make assurances, she stopped him, with her finger upon her lip, and went on again—

"And if, as may sometimes be the case, though not often, she hopes, the troubles which have borne heavily upon her may cast their shadow over her, and partially also, from their sympathy, over her generous friends, so noble and true, she will try, oh, so hard, to conquer

the sadness, to rise superior to the despondency, to shake off the doubts and fears. God helping her, she will do so, and her friends will have patience with her, and help her, too."

Rosa's small figure seemed to grow as she spoke, and a steadiness and continuity of purpose, hardly to have been looked for in the childish beauty, compressed her small mouth, and shone brightly in her steadfast eyes.

Mr. Crisparkle and her guardian contemplated her with wonder and admiration, though the latter slightly and almost imperceptibly shook his head.

Meeting their astonished glance, she smiled; nay, laughed aloud at the sight of Mr. Grewgious' dishevelled locks, which, from constant smoothing, first one way, and then the other, had compromised matters by remaining at the last stark upright, making of him a popular impersonation of fright. With the laugh she became the old Rosebud again, at least, the same externally.

"And now," said Mr. Grewgious, "that matter being settled, and settled to all our satisfactions, I am sure (don't let your champagne get cold, my dear, that is to say, I mean the opposite, but being a man with such remarkably confused ideas, I generally do mean the opposite of what I say, or rather, say the opposite of what I mean), when do you wish my ward to come to you, reverend sir; and when, my dear, do you wish to go?"

Mr. Crisparkle here mentioned Miss Twinkleton's plans with regard to Brighton, and Mr. Grewgious heartily agreed with them.

"Let us say, then, a fortnight from this time," said Mr. Grewgious, "that will allow your excellent mother plenty of time for deciding between the blue room and the green, and in making any other arrangements she may deem necessary. And now, my dear, what can I do for you before you go?"

Rosa, with a hanging head and a blushing cheek, would dearly like to see Helena.

"So you shall, my dear, so you shall; I will run across at once to Mr. Tartar's, and I have no doubt his rooms will be at your disposal."

Rosa, hiding her face still more, and colouring, until the tips of her pretty fingers were rosy red too, answered hesitatingly that she wanted to see Helena, not as she had before, but quite close this time; it—it wasn't like the same thing through a window."

"I understand," said Mr. Grewgious, putting his finger knowingly on one side of his nose, and nodding slyly at his ward. "When young ladies meet, bless their hearts!—I've seen 'em at it once or twice, and," continued Mr. Grewgious, "a most uncommon pretty sight it was—they fall into one another's arms, they clasp one another round the waist, they bring their rosy lips together. Why," continued Mr. Grewgious, dilating on his theme with the delight of an epicure, "it's most natural; it's only what other people would like to do too, if they dared."

Rosa joined heartily in Mr. Crisparkle's merry laugh; but, as she laughed, her blushes deepened.

"And to think," added Mr. Grewgious, sympathetically, "of two beautiful beings, with all the lovely and loving emotions of their sex agitating their bosoms; to think of their being separated by a chasm, when their hearts are full of the delight of meeting, full and running over. Why, my dear, you are quite right; you are perfectly and comprehensibly right."

Rosa, delighted to see how readily he was marching in a wrong direction, and greatly relieved to find how little her real motive was comprehended by him, recovered somewhat from her confusion, and courageously met his eye.

"And now, my dear, we must consider how we can best manage it; for you wouldn't, and we all of us

shouldn't, wish to do anything rashly, or to put our young friends opposite into any sort of danger."

"Oh, no," said Rosa, with a deep breath.

"Did you not tell me, reverend sir," continued Mr. Grewgious, "that our local friend is now in London?"

"I left him at the station, sir, and lost sight of him in the fog."

"And have you no clue to the reason for his giving up his situation so abruptly?"

"None whatever, except that I fear he wishes to have more time and opportunity to pursue his investigations, and to carry out his schemes for revenge."

"Ah, he is up to no good, is our local friend, we may be sure of that," said Mr. Grewgious, "and it behoves us, therefore, to be very careful; yet I should be sorry to disappoint my ward."

"I propose," said Mr. Grewgious again, after a moment's thought, with his hand on his ruffled locks, "that we, each of us, look out for an idea. The first who finds an idea speaks. When I say three," said Mr. Grewgious, lifting his hand, "let us sit still and ponder. One, two, three, and begin."

Bringing down his hand upon the table before him with a vehemence which startled the sparrows outside so effectually that, abandoning their fruitless search for that day, they flew to roost, Mr. Grewgious composed himself into an attitude of deep reflection, while Rosa and Mr. Crisparkle, following his directions, sat in solemn silence, waiting for the birth of an idea. Perhaps they had never felt in their lives so completely destitute of one.

For a few succeeding minutes nothing was to be heard in the room, save the loud ticking of the clock, the occasional tread of a footstep outside, and the distant roar from the city; then Mr. Grewgious began to exhibit signs of internal commotion. He breathed more quickly, screwed up both eyes tightly, exhibited

tokens of strangulation, and hurriedly loosened his cravat. The birth was at hand.

"Have you found an idea yet, reverend sir?" he enquired, abruptly, still in a state of agitation, and looking out of the window.

"I have turned the subject carefully over in my mind, but no plan, at all feasible, has occurred to me."

"And you, my dear?"

But Rosa's usually busy little brain had almost seemed to stand still during the interval, and she shook her head.

"I hope you won't consider it presumptuous," went on Mr. Grewgious, slowly, yet in a voice of smothered excitement, and with his screwed-up eyes still turned towards the window, "to have hit upon an idea before you, as I think I have. It isn't, by any means, because I am so flush of 'em; for I was born without ideas almost, and might have remained here until doomsday without finding one, but that I am sitting, as you perceive, with my face towards the window, and have had, therefore, the opportunity which you have not, of viewing Staple Inn, and seeing what was going on there. And what is it that my short-sighted eyes have gradually been taking in? Why, a slouching form, a slinking figure, an evil eye; to sum up all devilish unpleasantness in a word, my idea has appeared before me in bodily shape, and is—Look out of the window, Mr. Crisparkle—Shut your pretty eyes, my lamb—our local friend."

Rosa, with an exclamation of terror which she could not repress, drew closer to her guardian, and clung to his protecting arm.

"Don't be afraid, my dear," said Mr. Grewgious, looking down upon the girl's shrinking figure with the tenderest compassion in his unfinished features, "for Mr. Crisparkle is on one side of you, and *I* am on the other. If our local friend (whose intentions, no doubt,

are evil, and whom I beg to be permitted, parenthetically and *sotto voce*, to blast and blight) should venture to approach you, or even to cast one baleful glance in your direction, he would be crushed. And, when I say crushed," continued Mr. Grewgious, with a flushed face and an angry gesture, "I mean what I say, and mean crushed to fragments."

"If he could have known!" Rosa thought, trembling, as she knelt down beside him, and hid her pale face upon his shoulder. But he only knew as he laid his arm gently and protectingly around her, that she would never appeal to him in vain for help and for support; he only knew, as he looked once more defiantly across the way, that his old arm would grow strong and vigorous again to annihilate her enemies; he only knew that the soft touch of her round cheek against his was bringing up the warm blood there as hotly as in the days of his youth, and reviving sweet memories, scarcely tasted, but never to be forgotten; for he was but mortal, and could not read the thoughts of her agitated and frightened heart.

"Our local friend," continued Mr. Grewgious, when Rosa had a little recovered from the shock of knowing that dreadful man to be so near her, "has retired into the apartment which I pointed out to you once before, reverend sir, and in which he seems to concoct his hellish plans. Under the circumstance of our local friend being there in *propria persona*—which is not alarming, my dear, and only means that he is there himself; though to be sure that is unpleasant enough"—(this to Rosa, who had shuddered)—"I think I see the way clear to gratify my ward."

"Pray tell us how!" said the Minor Canon.

"Let me first propound a question," said Mr. Grewgious, deliberately, with the manner of an acute lawyer, whom nothing could induce to go indiscreetly direct to the heart of the matter. "Do you intend to visit Mr. Neville?"

"I thought of going to him to-morrow morning," answered the Revd. Septimus, "before returning to Cloisterham."

"Would you object to make your visit this evening?"

"Not in the least, if you wish it."

"I have noticed," continued Mr. Grewgious, "that Mr. Neville usually takes his walks in the evening, and indeed I should think anybody not a—not a salaman-der, would prefer to do so during this present state of the weather; so if you and Mr. Neville should go out together for a walk *this* evening, it would be a natural circumstance, and excite no suspicion. If you are not tired, reverend sir—for if you are, I beg to withdraw my idea before having given it utterance—you might like to walk with him."

"I am not in the least tired, and am quite at your disposal, particularly as I think I see what you are leading up to."

"I am leading up to it, no doubt, crookedly enough, having nothing straight about me from my nose to my legs," said Mr. Grewgious, looking down upon his nether continuations with a sigh for their imperfections, "and I dare say your mind, which is as straight as your body, has taken you ahead of me. But you don't need to tire yourself out with walking; you may take a cab or a hansom, or hail a passing omnibus, so as to get over as much ground as possible in the course of an hour or two. I take it to be fair in love and war to wear out the enemy."

"You think he will follow us?"

"I think it highly probable that he may, and that, being here in *propria persona*, he will be relying for the time on his satanic self and his own infernal devices, and will, when following, leave the path clear for us. Anyhow, we will wait and see if it happens as I expect, and if so, Miss Rosa may go to her friend."

Then Rosa and Mr. Grewgious, stealthily watching

behind the window curtains, soon saw Mr. Crisparkle and Neville emerge from the house opposite ; and a few seconds afterwards had the satisfaction of observing them followed by a dark figure, which Rosa tremblingly recognised as that of her terrible lover.

CHAPTER V

EDDY'S WIDOW

HELENA was still standing at the window where she had been watching her brother and Mr. Crisparkle pass out of Staple Inn together. The colour on her dark cheek was a trifle more brilliant than usual, and the light in her lustrous eyes was softened into inexpressible tenderness, before which pride had melted away, when she was startled by the sound of a light footstep, followed by a gentle rap upon the door ; and a moment afterwards, Rosa, with a beating heart, stood beside her.

" Rosa, you ? How glad I am to see you."

" And I to see you, dear, dear Helena ! "

If Mr. Grewgious' short-sighted eyes had been able to penetrate stone walls, he would have seen his glowing prediction verified, for the two girls fell into one another's arms, and laid their soft lips lovingly together.

" But how is it, dear," continued Helena, " that you are able to come to me ? Is the danger over ? May we meet again, freely and unrestrainedly ? "

" Did not Mr. Crisparkle say I was coming ? " asked Rosa, answering her friend's questions with another.

" No ; he only said he had come to fetch Neville for a walk. I was glad for him to go, for he has been working hard to-day, poor fellow ! although it is so hot ; and Neville forgets all his weariness when he sees his kind friend."

It seemed as if the sight did the same good office for Helena, for her lips were parted in a happy smile, and

all vestige of care and trouble had vanished from her face.

"I am come to stay a while, if you will have me," said Rosa, taking off her hat, and pushing back her clustering hair, "for I want to have a good, long talk with you. I *have* missed you, Helena."

"If I will have you, my pet? Why, I have been hungering and thirsting for you. But (looking archly at her friend) I'm afraid Mr. Tartar won't be pleased with the change."

"Oh, Mr. Tartar!" said Rosa, tossing her head. "What do I care about Mr. Tartar!" But the next moment, to Helena's great surprise, the pouting lips began to tremble, the dark eyes filled with tears, and, throwing her arms round her friend's neck, Rosa burst into a fit of passionate crying, sobbing like a child.

Helena drew the pretty head to her bosom, and gently stroked the soft hair, but she made no other attempt to soothe her for a while; until Rosa's sobs grew so violent and her delicate frame shook and trembled so alarmingly, that she became quite frightened.

"Rosa, you will make yourself ill," she whispered. "Try to compose yourself, my darling, and tell me all about it. What can have happened to grieve you so terribly?"

Holding the childish form closer to her bosom, Helena wiped the streaming eyes, kissed the convulsed mouth, and caressed the hot cheeks, until at length the sobs subsided.

"Tell me what it is, my child."

"Oh, I will, I will," sobbed Rosa, raising her tear-stained face and overflowing eyes, and meeting Helena's look of love and sympathy. "I came to tell you, dear. I cannot bear it alone any longer. And you will help me, Helena, you are so brave and strong, you will help me to do what is right?"

Helena's look was sufficient answer, as she smoothed back the tangled hair from Rosa's hot forehead.

"I am so giddy and thoughtless, so coquettish and vain, that even when he—that dreadful man—first looked admiringly at me, I did not abhor and detest it, as I did afterwards. Not that I liked him, Helena, for a single moment; but sometimes when Eddy—poor, poor Eddy! used to seem so indifferent to me; or when we were walking together, and he had eyes for every pretty girl who passed, and none for me; or when I saw how long the time seemed to him in my company, and how glad he often was to say 'good-bye'; then I used to think, in my anger at his neglect, 'ah, you do not care for me; never mind! I know some one, of whom you do not dream in your boyish self-sufficiency and conceit, as a rival, who would go a long way out of his road to catch a glimpse of me; whose heart I can set beating to suffocation when I like; and whose eyes glow, as yours have never glowed, when they meet mine.' Ah, I did not know then, that it was the fire of hell that lighted them!"

Again Rosa hid her burning face in her friend's protecting lap, and again Helena laid a gentle and caressing hand upon her head.

"I tried sometimes," continued Rosa, after a few minutes of silence, "to open Eddy's eyes, and show him the real state of things. I was not afraid of his being angry with his uncle; he was far too fond of him for that; but I thought he would care a little more for me, if he saw that another cared so much. I thought he would value me more, if he found out how precious I was in another's eyes. I hoped he might learn to love me then as I wanted to be loved, and as I knew, young as I was, that a bridegroom ought to love his bride; a husband, his wife. He treated me as a baby, and I behaved as one; making it, more shame for me, the chief amusement of my life to tease and worry him, and often weeping bitterly afterwards for having done it.

Yet though I grew every day more indifferent to him, and scarcely needed to sham indifference any more, I still looked forward to our marriage as inevitable. Many and many a time my heart ached bitterly as I thought of the long years which lay before us, when we should be yoked together, and should rebel against the yoke in vain."

"My poor darling!" said Helena soothingly, "I cannot imagine how any man could help loving you dearly, far less that man who was your betrothed husband."

"And yet I loved him through it all," said Rosa, putting up her hot lips to be kissed and comforted, and struggling hard to subdue the emotion mastering her. "I am so glad now, to think that I did love him to the end, poor boy! Yet it was better we parted when we did; far, far better! And though I am sorry to have grieved him at the last, I am not sorry for that."

"You did what you believed to be right, and that always brings peace, and can leave behind no regret," said Helena.

"Yes," said Rosa, "but that is not all I wanted to tell you. Very soon the admiration my music-master showed became irksome to me; very soon it became intolerable. I showed it him as plainly as I could, but instead of abandoning, he only redoubled his attentions, until you know at last how I felt towards him."

"I remember, indeed," said Helena.

"And now," continued Rosa, drawing still closer to her friend, and glancing round the darkening room with a look of terror, "I have something dreadful to tell you, but only *you*, Helena. I dare not mention it to my guardian, though he is so good and true, and I dare not mention it to Mr. Crisparkle, though he also is the very soul of honour; for they are both men, Helena; but you are a woman, and can feel for and with me, even though I should appear as degraded in your eyes

as I am in my own. And, confiding in you, Helena, I do so with the firm and full confidence that you will keep my secret."

Helena's smile and earnest eyes would have satisfied any one; and Rosa, needing no proof of the trustworthiness of her friend, was more than satisfied.

"Look," said Rosa, drawing a folded paper from her pocket, and handing it to her friend, "look and read, Helena, and put your arm round me while you do so, for I am almost dead with fright and terror; and forgive me for burdening you too, for I am sure if I kept it to myself any longer, I shall die."

Clasping her friend with one hand, Helena opened the paper with the other, and, straining her eyes in the gathering twilight to make out the words, read as follows—

"MY BELOVED.—You have fled before me, and think, dear, foolish one! that I could let you go. Know that there is not a spot on earth where I would not follow you, that there is no crack nor cranny in the wide universe where the fury and intensity of my passion would not enable me to find you out. In the remotest and most secluded corner of this great city, on the trackless paths of the ocean, I would haunt you with my presence, and—to cherish you as the apple of my eye—would hunt you down. I have been near you a hundred times when you have deemed me far away; I shall be near you a hundred times, when you have no visible token of my presence. I have revelled in the exquisite charm of your lovely face, gloated over your beautiful form, and pressed my burning lips to yours in thought, a thousand times, and no flush on your face, no look of fear or of delight has shown me that you felt it. Is the passion which consumes my heart utterly powerless to kindle a sympathetic spark in yours? It cannot be so; but if it were, even then you must be mine. You shall never—I swear it to you—you shall never belong to another. The blow I spoke of would

have fallen ere now, but that I have seen other eyes looking with admiration at your beauty, but that I have seen another face glow when your sweet voice fell upon his ear.

"Beware, my goddess! angel of my life! star of my existence! beware, beware! Can you wonder that any and every man who contemplates your beauty, that any and every man who basks in the light of your countenance, must become my hated rival—my deadliest enemy, for your sake. By this token, my beloved, that even as you read I am watching you, take warning and give heed to what I say; for I swear to you again, by Heaven and Hell, that, dead or living, you shall belong to no man but me."

Here the letter abruptly closed, without signature. After a pause, Rosa spoke again.

"I have had that letter two or three days," she said, "long enough to form a resolution which even before then had been taking shape and gathering in my brain. I have made up my mind to remain all my life as I should have remained if I had married Eddy, and he had died—his widow. Do not laugh at me, dear; it is a foolish way of putting it, I know. But it may satisfy the dead, perhaps," said Rosa, shuddering, "and it may appease that dreadful man. At any rate, only I then should have to suffer from his wrath."

"Satisfy the dead!" exclaimed Helena. "What new terror haunts you, dearest?"

"I have dreamt so often of Eddy lately," answered Rosa, in a low, frightened voice. "I used to dream of him in Cloisterham, after he was lost, but never unhappily or painfully. I fancied myself walking with him in the Close, or by the river, as we used to do; but we never quarrelled, as we so often had done in reality. He was kind and gentle, and loving, as he had been the last, last time. When I awoke then in the morning, my pillow was wet with tears, but they had been happy ones. Now my dreams are quite

different. I think I am sleeping in my little bedroom, just as I am really, and that Eddy is standing by my bedside. He does not look as Eddy used to look, but rather as the ghost of Eddy might look, if it could appear to me. I do not know why I am sure that it is he, but I *am* sure ; I feel it in my inmost heart. He never speaks a word, but looks at me steadily and sadly. I try to cry out, but my tongue is tied, and I can only make a feeble notion with my hand. Then he vanishes ; and in vanishing I see his face contract with an anguish so terrible, with a sadness so bitter and intense, that I wake with the fright, shaking in every limb, and bathed in perspiration."

"Your nerves are terribly excited," said Helena, "and the dullness of your life here wears upon your constitution, and will seriously affect your health. You must have a change, dear one, and the dreams will vanish too."

"That is not all," continued Rosa. "This very evening, as I was entering Staple Inn with Mr. Crisparkle, we met a man coming out. I was thinking of my dream, it is true, and perhaps that may have made me partly fancy it, but as the man looked at me in passing, I saw his face grow pallid with suffering, and drawn with the anguish of Eddy's in my dream."

"My darling, you seriously alarm me," said Helena. "At any rate, we must speak to Mr. Grewgious about *this* ; you must have a change of scene immediately."

"I am going to have a change," explained Rosa. "I am going to Brighton with Miss Twinkleton, and then I am going to stay with Mrs. Crisparkle for the present."

With a start, and a sharp exclamation, only half uttered, Helena for one moment let fall the arm encircling Rosa's waist, and stepped back—only for one moment ; the next she drew her almost passionately towards her again, and covered her face with kisses.

"Do you not approve, Helena?" asked Rosa, surprised, trying to see her friend's face in the darkness.

"Oh, yes, yes!" answered Helena, in a voice which she strove to render cheerful, but which, in spite of herself, waxed slow and sad; "you must, you must be happy there."

"Then why do you speak so sadly; what are you sorry for?"

"Oh, I am not sorry, Rosa; I am glad, glad with my whole heart. Believe me, dear, I am indeed. Do not mind my weeping, Rosa; they are tears of joy. What could I wish better for you than that you should live with—them? You will forget your troubles there, and grow contented and happy again. How can it be otherwise; surrounded by friends so generous and high-minded, so large-hearted, and so true."

If joy were the source from which Helena's tears sprang, it was a prolific one indeed; for notwithstanding her strong effort to control herself, they fell thick and heavy. Clenching her delicate hands, and biting her lips till the blood sprang, she kept back sob or sound, but the barrier which confined her tears had broken down utterly, and they must and would have way. Rosa, terrified, clung to her friend.

"You, crying, Helena," she said, in great distress. "What cruel thing have I said or done to hurt you? I never knew you shed tears, even during all that dreadful time in Cloisterham. I cannot bear it," sobbed Rosa, weeping in sympathy; "you, who are always so fearless and undaunted."

"It is all over now," said Helena, at last, "and will never happen again. I do not know how I could be so foolish, but all of a sudden, here in the darkness (I have had my troubles, too, you know), in the midst of my joy for you, came a feeling of loneliness for myself, deeper and sadder than I ever had before. I felt myself—it was a foolish fancy—cast out, alone,

and forgotten. Oh, Rosa, you will not forsake me ? ”

“ Forsake you, my best and dearest friend ; oh, never, never.”

“ And now it is time for you to go,” continued Helena. “ You told me you dared not stay more than an hour. God bless you ! God make you happy, darling ! He will, He will, I know.”

Helena bowed her head again, and kissed Rosa tenderly. Poor Rosa’s cheek was wet with tears, but Helena’s was dry ; she had fought out that brief battle with herself, and wept no more.

CHAPTER VI

MOTHER COOMBS HAS A VISITOR

THE heat of the last few days had terminated in violent thunderstorms, and a chilly, steady rain now falling, cooled the heated pavements of the city. In the extreme east of it a man of nearly forty was trudging along under his umbrella the streets with the air of one who knows where he is, and what he means to do. After walking some distance he stood still, doubtfully, and looking round, found himself face to face with a hideous old woman, who was leering at him out of her bleared and watering eyes.

"Was you a lookin' for any one here, deary?" she enquired. "P'raps I can show you what you want, and you'll give me a trifle for the trouble, partickler as times is bad, and it's a hard matter for a poor old soul to scrape together enough to live on, deary; though, Lord knows, 'tis little enough she wants, and t'aint long neither as she'll want that little."

"I was looking for a woman of the name of Coombs," he said, regarding her fixedly. "A woman celebrated for mixing opium, and recommended to me on that account; if I am not much mistaken, you are she."

"Lord bless ye, so I am!" retorted the woman, with a chuckle, and trembling from the eagerness with which she spoke. "Lord love ye, sir, 'tis nobody but me. 'Twould 'a broke my heart not to have come across ye, and so have missed ye, deary. There's people in this court as would a sent ye to Jack Chinaman, as soon as not—sooner than not—just to spite me, deary. They'd a told ye that he knows how to mix it as well

as me ; but it's a lie, a wicked lie, and they're thieves and liars as says it. I've only been out buyin' a bit o' whittles, for one must live, must live, deary, and times is bad, times is drefful bad. Come in, come in, and you shall have what you want in a winkin. I'm drenched to the bone and a shakin' with ager ; but I'll have it ready for ye, before ye're ready for it, deary. I will upon my soul."

Trembling with joy at having found a customer, and shaking from cold and wet, the withered fingers of the hag closed impatiently upon a key, which she drew from the pocket of her ragged dress, and she strove to put it in the lock. Twice, thrice it fell from her palsied hand, until at length her companion, though without any show of impatience, putting her aside, opened the door himself.

Before him he dimly perceived, by the faint and murky light which penetrated from the court outside, a dilapidated and tottering staircase, which his companion hastily motioned him to ascend.

Following close upon his steps, she opened a door at the top, and almost pushed him before her, as if she feared he might yet desert her, if not kept close, as they entered a small room together.

The smell outside in the open court had been foul enough, indeed, for noses not accustomed to such odours ; but the smell issuing from the room was more loathsome and disgusting still.

Mingling with the scent of unaired beds, and drying, half-washed clothes and foul decay, was another, penetrating, sickly sweet and almost overpowering scent—the smell of opium.

The man drew back involuntarily, but the woman, pushing him still further in, closed and locked the door behind him.

He was a brave man enough, and accustomed to all sorts of adventures, and had many a time seen danger close before him, terrible and threatening, without

flinching ; here, too, was only an old woman whom in one moment his strong man's arm could render powerless, and yet a strange terror fell upon him, and the loathsome air made him sick and faint.

From the early morning it had been only half-day in the city ; in the court outside it was evening ; and here it was the dead of night. He would have opened the door again—for even the air of the court was pure compared to this, but he could see nothing, and, groping with his hands, he only struck against something cold and hard as iron.

“ Wait a bit, wait a bit,” said the woman, groping also about as if she were seeking something. “ I'll strike a light, and then I'll have it ready for ye in next to no time, deary. Celebrated ! ha, ha ! They knows that, they knows it. There's a many, a many, deary, who's gone to the world's end to seek comfort, and has come to me at last and found it here, by old Mother Coombs, who knows the right mixin' of it.”

She had lit the candle by this time, and now, seating herself exhausted, coughed and spat till the few scattered teeth in her head, as if anxious to quit an abode upon which they held such uncertain tenure, shook visibly.

His eyes had, however, in the meantime, grown accustomed to the darkness, and he had dimly made out the principal objects in the room before that. They were not many ; a wretched bedstead, against which he had stumbled on entering, a crazy chair or two, a crippled table, supporting itself as best it could against a wall, and a battered easy chair, in which he had seated himself, striving to overcome the giddiness which threatened to overwhelm him, and almost already feeling the effect of the stupefying opium, so strongly was he affected by the sickly scent.

He had made out these few details in one sharp, comprehensive glance ; so strong was the instinct and the habit of his life, even though his eyes were

growing heavy, and a mist rose before his vision as he gazed.

When the woman recovered from her fit of coughing, she turned to view him. Her red and swollen eyelids covered eyes which had learned to scrutinise almost as sharply as his ; but there was nothing to excite suspicion in his appearance ; his head was bent ; and his eyes almost stupidly cast upon the ground.

" Ah, you've found out the right seat, deary," she croaked ; " let you alone for that. This ain't a par-tickler out-and-out court, and this room might be better than it is ; but I'll warrant you that there ain't a court in all London as have held so much delight and happiness within it as this, and in another half an hour, deary, you will have tasted the delights of Paradise."

He made no answer, but remained intent upon the floor, and after eyeing him again for a moment with a satisfied grin, she turned to prepare the pipe for him.

" It's trouble brought you to me, ain't it, deary ? It don't need a lynx-eye to make out that, nor to guess at it neither. 'Tis trouble brings the most here, except the Chinamen, and them as has learned it in furrin lands ; and maybe it's trouble that's brought them to it too ; Lord knows ! But what a blessin' to think that they forgets that here, and comes in heaven ; so cheap, so cheap, too."

He murmured something that might have been assent or dissent, she knew not which, and still his eyes were cast upon the ground.

" Oh, I've had a many, a many sittin' there before you," she went on. " Gentlemen as had lost their fortunes, and found 'em again here, deary ; gentlemen as had been crossed in love, and ladies, too. Ah, you may believe me, or you may not, as you please, but it's the livin' truth, deary—ladies, too."

Raising his head quickly, as if for the first time he had heard what she said, he asked if his pipe were ready.

"In a minnit, in one little minnit, deary. Lord love you, ye'd a had it afore now, but my fingers was numbed with the wet and cold, and are a shakin' still with the thought of having nearly missed ye, deary. Tell us, lovey, was you crossed in love, maybe?"

"No, not that."

"Ah, that's a pity, that is," she muttered, "for in a leetle, leetle half-hour you'd have had her in your arms, deary. Aye, that you would, take my word for it, and *I* ought to know. There's a many who've been crossed in love, who cuts their own throats, or hers; or dashes out their own brains, or the other's; or throws themselves into the rushing river, who never need have done it if they'd come to me, for they'd 'a had her sure and certain, aye, much more sure and certain than their rival, deary."

"You think, then, that the imagination conjures up visions, under the influence of opium, almost equal to the reality?" he enquired, lifting his head again.

"You speak the truth, deary," she answered, chuckling. "Leave out the almost, and you speaks the truth. Not almost; far, far better than the reality. In the vision you have perfect enjoyment; all, all you wants and wishes for. In the reality, as a gentleman like you knows better than me, there's more than half disappointment—more than half, deary, sometimes all."

"You open up enchanting vistas," he remarked, dreamily. "Make haste, I am impatient."

"And well you may be," she answered, handing him the pipe. "There, take it, take it, and when you've tried it once you'll try it again. 'Tis a taste that always makes ye long for more. Good luck for us, it always makes ye long for more."

Taking the pipe thoughtfully from her hand, he put it to his lips.

The rain poured heavily against the window pane; the ragged curtain fluttered in the draught, sharp-

teethed rats gnawed behind the wainscot, and the withered figure of the hag, resting on the bed—now, as she moved, half hidden in the darkness, now, lit up weirdly by the flickering light—might have been an evil spirit presiding over the whole.

If the pipe were to open for him the gates of heaven, it seemed as if the road there lay through hell.

The woman regarded him attentively, with a cat-like and stealthy gaze. Making a great pretence of going to sleep upon the bed, and often fearfully racked by her cough, she yet never turned away her scrutinising eyes. The satisfied grin which had sat upon her countenance at first, faded, then vanished quite, and gave place to a malignant scowl.

Rising, she made as if she would approach him, when, ringing through the rising wind and splashing rain, outside, came a fearful shriek, succeeded by another, and yet another.

The man, letting his pipe fall, sprang to his feet, and hastily drew something out of the pocket of his coat; his face reddened heavily, and his downcast eye grew, as if by magic, keen and bright. Was it really hell in this accursed place, then, and were those the screams of the condemned?

“What was that?” he asked, shuddering, yet with a sharp, clear ring in his voice, and with a resoluteness as if he would compel an answer. “What was that fearful cry?”

“What was that?” repeated the woman, who had carefully observed and noted his every gesture, and accompanying her words with a fierce oath; “nothin, nothin’ at all. Only a drunken neighbour a beatin’ of his wife. Go out and interfere between them if you like, and have your own brains knocked out, and hers into the bargain, or at the best beat twice as much when you are done for. What’s that you’ve got in your hand?”

The sudden sharpness of the enquiry; the feeling

that she was right, and that interference would be madness ; the confusion consequent on the sense that he had betrayed himself ; and the fear that the work he had come to do might be frustrated on that account, combined to restore the man to a sense of his position. Hastily replacing the something in his pocket, he sat down again.

“ What did you come for ? ” continued the woman, in a fury ; “ what do you mean by a bringin’ weapons, and God knows what else, along with you ? Do you think a poor old soul as earns a honest livin’ is to be looked upon as thieves and robbers ? What did you come here for, a pokin’ and a pryin’ ? You warn’t smokin’, I see that. Oh, deary, deary me ! ”

“ I’m not accustomed to it,” he returned, “ and that’s the truth. Here, you take the pipe, and smoke it ; I will pay for it all the same, and while you are smoking, let me tell you a story. ”

“ Oh, deary, deary me ! ” complained the woman, falling upon the bed again, and clasping her knees with both hands, while she rocked herself to and fro, as if in bodily agony. “ I see he warn’t a smokin’ of it. I knowed as he hadn’t come for no good purpose, when I see that ; them as longs for it don’t play with it aforehand, but goes at it with all their might and main, as eager as a suckin’ babe upon its mother’s breast. Oh, deary, deary me ! ”

“ I tell you,” he said, “ that I came here to do you no harm. I did not come to smoke, that is true, but I came to benefit you, nevertheless. You say the times are hard ; a few bright pieces of gold, though hard themselves, will not make them harder.”

He saw by the sudden change of expression on her face, and by the glitter in her eye, that his words were beginning to tell ; but still she did not change her position, and, continuing to rock herself, complained further—

“ To fall upon a poor, lone woman that never did

nothing to hurt nobody ; that has been able—through knowin' the right receipt for mixin' of it—to give comfort to hundreds, who found no comfort more—no, not even in the bottle ; who earns a honest livin' by a honest trade ; and never had nothin' to do, neither with peelers nor with law courts, though she've been hard put to it many and many a day. Oh, deary, deary me ! ”

“ Come ! ” he said, persuasively. “ Listen to me ! I only came here to tell you a story, and I will pay you for listening to it, every minute that it costs you. If you can supplement my story, which I think you can, I will pay you double, treble. If you cannot, or will not, I will go my way again, as I came ; and if you are none the better for my visit, you will assuredly be none the worse.”

Drawing out his purse, to satisfy her that his words were earnest, he took two sovereigns out, and holding it so as to show her plainly that it held many more, continued—

“ These two pieces are yours, when you have heard my story. When you have supplemented and, as I hope, completed it, I will place the purse and its contents in your hand.”

“ There's no harm done, I suppose, in hearing of it ? ” she said, her eyes and mouth watering at the sight of the gold. “ There's no law, as I knows on, to punish a poor old soul for listenin' to what is told her. We're hedged all round about with laws—cruel laws for the poor, though easy enough for the rich and powerful as makes 'em, but I reckon there ain't no law at present to prevent my hearin' what ye say, though like enough, they 'ill be makin' of one by-and-by.”

“ Then take my pipe and smoke it while I speak,” he said. “ I suspect it will not be too strong for you, though it would very soon have drowned all my faculties—except the faculty of imagination, as you tell me.”

“ You are right again there, deary,” she answered,

with a chuckle, recovering her good humour, while she relit the pipe, and put it to her mouth. "It's only strong enough to rouse up my faculties, and to make me bright and wakeful, while listening to ye." Then making herself as comfortable as she could, and composing herself to listen, she made a sign to him to begin.

"My story is not long," he commenced, fixing his eyes attentively upon her, "nor is it, perhaps, either peculiar or original. It is the story of two men—uncle and nephew—both young. The uncle, a dark man, of six or seven and twenty; the nephew, almost a boy still, barely twenty."

He saw the pipe tremble in her hand, and that her eyes, dilating, met his as if in a manner fascinated by their gaze, but she spoke no word.

"The nephew, a light-hearted, thoughtless youth; frank, unsuspecting and good natured, is—although so young—betrothed to a beautiful young girl. This betrothal has grown out of the earnest, expressed wish of the parents on both sides—long dead—for the two, boy and girl, are orphans.

"The children, brought up in constant communication with one another, have grown accustomed to this idea, and, though without any strong attachment on either side, are contented in it. The time, which running its rapid course has transformed them into man and woman, brings the period nigh when they will be united for ever.

"The uncle, who, apparently, is deeply attached to his nephew, conceives a violent passion for this girl; it burns inwardly, for he gives no outward sign or token, but it burns fiercely, consuming and devouring his heart. Perhaps to obtain relief from the pain and agony he suffers, he takes to smoking opium."

Pausing with his searching eyes upon her, he seemed to try to read her very thoughts; but though her eyes met his again as if drawn there against her will, she

showed no other emotion, and uttered no sound, except a kind of crooning comfort and enjoyment of her pipe.

"At this crisis, just before the time fixed for the marriage, and when it seems inevitable, the nephew disappears. There is strong reason to suppose he has been murdered. The body remains undiscovered.

"The uncle, who accepts this surmise as sure and certain—and indeed it seems the only probable one—and bowed down with grief so intense and terrible that he has wasted away to a mere nothing, has moved heaven and earth to find out and hunt down the murderer. He is moving heaven and earth to find him still."

The woman laughed; a laugh so harsh and discordant, that, as it rang through the room, even the rats' sharp teeth ceased in terror, and scuttling away behind the wainscot, they abandoned, for a short time, their work of destruction. The rain fell less heavily, but the wind, which had been howling outside, changed its tune, and laughed too, as if a thousand demons peopled it.

"Do you think he will find him?" enquired the narrator, as the echoes her laugh had awakened died away.

"How should I know," she replied, "what do you come a tellin' of your stories to me for? What odds do it make to me, whether he find him or not?"

"You remember that I promised to pay you for listening," he said.

"Yes, I do, deary, indeed I do; I ain't forgot that. My memory's goin' for a many things; it's goin' fast, but I don't forget that, or I shouldn't have listened to ye. Go on, if you like, or tell me another story for a change. There's prettier stories than that; of lovely ladies and lovely princes as comes to court and marries 'em. Tell me another story this time, deary, and let it be a merrier one. Murder's an ugly thing to talk of in the dark."

"But you forget," he replied, "that I promised you much more money, if you could help me to finish my story. It is very incomplete now. The murdered young man is not found; the murderer is undiscovered, and the disconsolate uncle is unappeased. I want my story finished."

"Do you want it finished here?" she enquired peevishly, "then ask the rats; ask the wind roarin' outside; ask anybody you like, but not me. What do I know about it?"

"I told you that the uncle, to soothe the pangs of a hopeless passion, took to smoking opium."

"And he did right," retorted the woman, with sudden energy, "he did right! Where else could he go for comfort! I'd a done it myself. I told you that them as had been crossed in love, could have what they wanted here; or anywhere else, if there is such a place, where they knows the right mixin' of it."

"And I know more," continued the man, "I know that he came here to smoke; in this very room, probably on that very bed."

"He couldn't a come to nowhere better," said the woman, indifferently, "maybe you're right. There's a many comes and a many goes. I mixes for 'em and they has their visions, and they knows that opium's rare, and pays accordin'; then they goes; but they don't tell me, deary, what their visions was."

"I know also," pursued the man quietly, always with his searching eyes upon her face, "that from this court, and this house, an old and feeble woman made a journey—for her, a long journey—to follow this man. I know that conquering all difficulties which must have lain in her way, she persevered and tracked him to his destination; that she did this secretly; and that the object of her chase had no idea that he was followed. I know that notwithstanding her age, and her decrepitude, she made this journey twice. I am sure that a very strong interest in his actions must have influenced her."

The hag, who, during these last remarks, had been eyeing him with undisguised astonishment, now, letting her pipe fall, got down from her seat as quickly as her trembling limbs would allow her, and taking up the puny light, approached her visitor, and without the least attempt to hide what she was doing, examined his countenance closely and curiously; then abruptly setting down the candle, she put the unexpected question—

“Do I know ye, deary?”

“You must be the best judge of that,” he answered.

“There was two,” continued the woman, “as give me three and sixpence; two, as I never forgits, out of gratitood. One was a handsome youth, who told me—’twas last Christmas Eve—that he hadn’t got a sweetheart, and that his name warn’t Ned. He was—for all he told me a lie—the nephew as is lost; and t’other three and sixpence, deary, that was you.”

He made no attempt to contradict her, and she went on, grinning with delight at her own penetration.

“You was a easy-going chap then, deary, not so brisk as you are now; your head was snowy white then, and I’m blessed if at this minute, I see in it one white hair; other people grows older with time, but you has the secret of growing young again, deary. Ha, ha! give me your secret for mine; a fair exchange is no robbery; that would puzzle you, that would. Aye, for all the change that’s come over ye, my eyes is sharper than ye thought for, though I was blind at first; and I knows ye now, and would know ye among a thousand, for t’other three and sixpence, deary.”

As he still remained silent, with a hoarse chuckle, she continued—

“Show me the gold again, lovey; the bright, sparkling gold in your purse; ’tis chilly and cold, and I’ll make up a little fire in the grate, and sitting before it, we’ll have a chat again—a cozy, comfortable chat—and you’ll give me the purse into my hand, and we’ll

change places, while I talks and you listens, deary. Don't be afraid, give it to me. I'll not run away with it. I'll help ye, I will! I'll tell ye what it'll comfort ye to hear, pretty nigh as well as the pipe, lovey. Ugh, how the wind howls outside, and roars at us down the chimney! First smoke and then fire, deary. Never heed what ye hears at the neighbour's, she's accustomed to it, and I reckon she makes more on it nor it is. I've heerd her screech, that I never thought to see her alive again, but she isn't dead yet, deary, and half of it's sham I don't doubt."

Drawing her chair close to him, the hag began to relate, and he to listen. The fire she had made burnt up briskly and crackled lustily; the only lusty thing there! The rats, reassured, returned to their ravages, and hastened to complete what they had begun; the wind shrieked in at the window, roared through the court, and shook the wretched tenement, till it trembled to its basis; the fire burned itself down to ashes; the fictitious night of the court outside turned to real night, and still the crackled, eager voice of the hag, mumbled at his ear, and still his watchful eyes were turned towards her face.

CHAPTER VII

THE DEAD AND THE QUICK

PONDERING over the instability of human greatness, and with a shadowy and undefined fear haunting the region of his waistcoat—in fact, lying heavy there in company with an undigested dinner, taken some hours before—that at the end of the year, now in its autumnal and shortening stage, the burden and dignity of mayorship would fall from his shoulders—so fitted to bear them—his Honour turns out of the ancestral home which he adorns, and proceeds, in solitary state and grandeur, to take his constitutional.

A vague suspicion, which certain outward signs and tokens—palpable enough to one less completely armoured in self-esteem than his Honour—have tended to arouse, that, in the eyes of Cloisterham, he has fallen somewhat from his high estate, coupled with a feeling—not of fear as yet, but as nearly like it as one so invulnerable can be supposed to feel—that on some subsequent occasions he had not quite so brilliantly distinguished himself as in the affair of Mr. Landless (when even his enemies and calumniators had been compelled to acknowledge, in spite of themselves, that he had not only shone as a bright particular star, but had displayed a depth of penetration and keenness of intellect almost unparalleled) gnaws at the Mayor's heart.

Why Mr. Jasper, whom he had favoured so unreservedly with his improving conversation, should leave a town where he could enjoy that privilege, is a problem which the Mayor does not attempt to solve.

“Put not your trust in princes!” murmurs the

Mayor, pathetically, as he paces to and fro, "no, nor in choir-masters!"

Dismissing the thought, he quickens his pace involuntarily, in anticipation of the treat awaiting him, and of the complacent admiration of himself which the perusal of the epitaph on his wife's tombstone never fails to awaken; when, to his surprise, he sees that he is anticipated.

Before the monument of Mrs. Sapsea is a man upon his knees, who rising suddenly and turning round, discloses the face and figure of Durdles—Durdles, begrimed and dusty, with a short, dirty pipe, brown from constant use, in the corner of his mouth; a hammer in one hand, and his never-failing dinner bundle—though he has long dined—in the other.

"Why, it's only you," stammers his Honour at last.

"And who should it be, if not Durdles?" replies that worthy, regarding the Mayor with a by no means propitiatory glance, and removing his short pipe from between his teeth, to spit upon the grass. "Who comes a wisiting of 'em except Durdles? When the day's fine and Durdles have got a ten-minute to spare, which ain't often, through being most overrun with work, and not a bit overrun with time to do it in, Durdles comes out to visit 'em. Not having visited Mrs. Sapsea for a long time, a year a'most, and having a notion to find out how things is going on down there with that old 'ooman, and having fust cleaned himself, as is the proper thing to do when a genleman is going to call upon a lady, Durdles sets out to do it."

Mr. Sapsea gulps down the feelings which are naturally aroused within him on hearing Mrs. Sapsea, deceased—who would have been a sort of Lady Mayoress, if her liver had supported her to that epoch—spoken of so disrespectfully, as an "old woman," sagaciously considering that any expression thereof would probably check the explanation, upon which Durdles has now entered in earnest, and feeling, in spite of this

incomprehensible beginning, a strong curiosity to hear the end.

“ Well ! ” continues Durdles, drawing strongly on his pipe, and puffing the smoke with perfect indifference in the face of his Honour, “ I takes my hammer, which is house-bell and front-door knocker, when I wisits them, and I raps and raps, and raps and raps again, and leaves off rapping, and stare and poke my fingers into my ears, which seem all of a sudden to be stopped up with cotton-wool, and raps once more. It warn’t of no use ; there wern’t no cotton-wool in Durdles’ ears. They was as clear as Natur made ’em, and as empty of any thing or body to obstruct ’em, as is Mrs. Sapsea’s tomb. Instead o’ answering to the perlite hinqury of Durdles, ‘ Well, mum, and how are you gitting on down there ? ’ with : ‘ Pretty well, pretty well, Durdles, thankin’ you kindly for the haskin’ ; as well as can be expected within the narrow limits of my ’abitation, and the consekent closeness of the hatmosphere,’ that perwerse female, contrairy to the well-known ’abits of her sex, remains as silent—as silent as a oyster. You think that Mrs. Sapsea lies in that there silent tomb, where she was laid, and where she ought to lie. Durdles thought so, and yet I tell ye now, and Durdles knows what he’s talking about, that she ain’t there no more than you nor me. I tell ye that that there female, who ought in the nature of things to be lying quiet and comfortable where she was buried, has wanished.”

“ Vanished ! ” repeats the Mayor mechanically, “ vanished ! You are drunk, Durdles, quite indecently intoxicated. I am ashamed of you ; I wouldn’t have believed it, if I hadn’t seen it myself. You have been talking the most execrable nonsense ; you have been fancying, I see it in your face, that you frightened me. Ha, ha, the thought tickles me ! You would have to have been born, Durdles, a long time before you could do that. The man you see before you,” continues the Mayor, pompously, puffing himself out like a turkey-

cock, the high colour of indignation on his cheek increasing his resemblance to that pugnacious bird, "is a man, Durdles, humbly, yet fully conscious of his social position; impregnated with the belief that the Almighty has graciously endowed him with gifts superior to the common herd; grateful for his high station, as an Englishman of mark, which, in contradiction to all foreigners—imbecile lot!—forbids him to feel fear. Come to me when you are sober; but heed my words, and make off for to-day, or it will be worse for you."

"No, heed my words!" exclaims Durdles, raising his hand solemnly, "heed my words, you, Mr. Sapsea; I tell ye, with Cloisterham a hearing of me, and a bearing witness to what I say, that Mrs. Sapsea, now dead nigh upon two years, has arose from her grave, and is, as likely as not, a walking this here earth of ours. I tell ye, that it's solemn truth that her coffin's empty, and that she has vanished. I tell ye, that she may be a waiting for ye in your house there. Go in and be comfortable, if ye can, with the dead at yer side. If ye doubts Durdles' words, then have the vault entered and the coffin opened, and ye'll prove them true. Have the coffin opened and then say if Durdles knows what he's a talking about. I renounces ye and all your works. There's an old saying 'that murdered men can't rest in their graves.' Murdered women, as is nat'ral in the sex, may be more restless still. There's folks in Cloisterham as says, for all you are Mayor, that you, in a sort of way, *did* for your wife, by a forcin' that poor female, as was weak in the back and of a sickly constitootion, to break it, lookin' up to ye!"

* * * *

Miss Twinkleton and Rosa had met with a pleasant set of rooms in Brighton facing the sea, from the bow-windows of which they could watch the brightly-dressed visitors to that renowned watering-place, who,

sauntering by, for the most part as bright-faced and cheerful as their attire, looked as if they had cast off London care with London dust and smoke, and made up their minds thoroughly to enjoy themselves.

Their landlady, also, was as gay and pleasant in appearance as the rooms themselves, and might have been made to match them ; so there was every reason to hope that the roses on both ladies' cheeks, faded in the thunderous atmosphere surrounding the Billickin, would bloom again, or make room for new ones.

The fresh air, blowing from the sea ; the music of the rolling waves, sometimes varied—and variety is ever charming—by the music from “ German Bands ” upon the Promenade ; the rows of blooming school-girls, walking together in twos and threes, headed by a young teacher, as giddy as themselves, and brought up in the rear by a female dragon, stern of visage and Argus-eyed, reminding Rosa of her own happy school days ; the joyous laugh from the children, building speedily-demolished sand-castles on the beach ; the brightness and cheerfulness on every hand, so pleasant a contrast to the roar and rattle, grit and dust of the vast Babylon they had left behind—all these things cheered Rosa, and lightened the load on her sad young heart.

On a bright sunny morning, Rosa, leaving Miss Twinkleton and the landlady in deep discussion about the dinner, and knowing that on such occasions she could well be spared, slipped away down to the beach, bent on finding out some cosy nook by the water, where she could sit undisturbed, fanned by the cooling sea breeze, and refresh herself—for in whatever gloomy channel her thoughts ran, they always did refresh her—with the glories of the sea.

She passed, also, a group of robust seamen, who greeted her kindly in their rough way, and one of them, who had lost a bright-eyed daughter many year before, looked wistfully down upon the beautiful little

face, sending after her a hearty "God bless ye, Missy."

Leaving them, too, behind, Rosa went on until she came to a spot secluded enough to satisfy her. A large boat, drawn up high upon the shore, afforded her protection against the hot sun, and shut out all sight and almost all sound of the people upon the beach.

With a soft, dreamy sensation stealing over her ; a peace and comfort indescribable ; a feeling of security and happiness which she had not felt for months ; she lazily watched the boats upon the water rowing to and fro—some fishing-smacks manned by sunburnt, hard-featured, and hard-handed mariners ; some pleasure boats, brightly painted, and with gay awnings to shield the passengers from the burning sunshine, until at last her attention was attracted to a smart little yacht, which appeared to be bearing straight towards the spot where she was sitting. Its white sails bellied out in the breeze, and the figure-head seemed, to her idle fancy, to be leaning intently forward to spy her out in her hiding-place.

Smiling at her own folly, Rosa, nevertheless, watched with interest the natty little craft which evidently intended to put in at Brighton ; and as it came nearer, she saw that there were gentlemen on board. With half-closed eyes she noticed all this, and noted it sleepily in some corner of her brain ; and then the delicious drowsiness was not to be contended against any longer—she had slept but little the night before—and, lulled by the soft murmur of the waves, her heavy lids closed, and she fell asleep.

In her dreams the yacht, which had been the last object apparent to her waking senses, still haunted her. She seemed to see it plainly still, as it sailed straight towards her, ever nearer and nearer, until at last, with a grating sound, it stranded upon the sand at her feet, and the mysterious figure-head, coming out of its place and

approaching her, revealed itself before her astonished vision as—Mr. Tartar.

Mr. Tartar ! who from head and upper part, came into sudden possession of a body and legs, in a manner which would have been miraculous out of the land of dreams, and which startled Rosa, not a little, even there ; for she was looking now with her eyes wide open—her hat fallen off, and her hair dishevelled—right into the blue orbs of the sea-lieutenant : into the blue eyes of Mr. Tartar which looked out smilingly from his sun-burnt visage as he stood, hat in hand, looking down upon her.

Springing up hurriedly, covered with confusion and blushes which enhanced her loveliness (at least the sea-lieutenant seemed to think so) a thousand-fold, Rosa rubbed her eyes, to punish them for their laziness, and with a puzzled look at the sea, where no yacht was to be seen, came at last to the conclusion that she had been sleeping, and was now awake, and that she must have been sleeping for a time, for the water, which had been almost at her feet, had retreated some distance, leaving a wide stretch of sand before her.

The sea-lieutenant appeared in no hurry, not in the least ; he stood as steadily and quietly as if he were stationed there in performance of his duty, and would have been ready and willing to stand another hour ; yet his blue eyes seemed totally indifferent to the glories of the sea and sky before him, and to have only thought and feeling for the sweet face on which he gazed.

“ How did you come here ? ” enquired Rosa, still colouring deeply, and so angry with herself for doing so that tears of vexation came into her eyes. “ Oh, if anything is the matter, tell me so at once.”

At these words, Mr. Tartar recovered the use of his tongue, and the rest of his senses, all of which, with the exception of sight (which had been put, as it were, under high pressure) appeared to have deserted him (or perhaps had been absorbed into that faculty), and

becoming aware of the indiscretion of staring a young lady out of countenance, turned as red as she, and began to murmur an apology.

Nothing whatever was the matter, and he begged her pardon for having startled her by appearing before her so unexpectedly. He had been looking for her, commissioned to do so by Mr. Grewgious, who was now waiting for them at the lodgings, and finding her so sound asleep, had not dared to disturb her slumbers. Would she forgive him, and believe that he—that he—in short (quite overwhelmed with confusion), it *was* a dilemma, now, wasn't it?

Rosa, busy smoothing her ruffled hair, and arranging her hat, made no attempt to answer that question, being absorbed in another; to wit: what would the girls say, if they knew, which they never should, that he had found her asleep; and her hair as rough as rough could be? And how modest and handsome he looked standing there, with his hat still in his hand!

"We all came together," explained Mr. Tartar, "about an hour ago; Mr. Crisparkle and myself in my yacht (the weather is so lovely, that I persuaded him to a little trip with me), and Mr. Grewgious came down by train to meet us here. I thought," he continued modestly, "that perhaps the ladies would favour us with their company on board for a few hours. The weather is all that can be desired, and Lobley, my man, you know, is quite enraptured at the idea of doing the honours of the water. He was running to seed in London, and it would be a matter of charity to give him something to do." Would she—would Miss Twinkleton—gratify them both, and let him show them Brighton from the sea?

"I should like to go myself Mr. Tartar; very much, I am sure; but I am afraid Miss Twinkleton won't. Now I come to think of it, I am certain she won't. She's just the sort of person to be extremely sea-sick. and though she might say 'yes,' not to disappoint me,

I couldn't accept the sacrifice on any account ; so, though I am very, very sorry you have had so much trouble for nothing, I fear we must give it up."

She began to wonder again—this time puzzling her little head, as to why it was so difficult to do right ; and even to know, with certainty, what was right. She wanted to be good ; she wanted to avoid being the cause of undeserved suffering to others, and was willing to suffer herself instead ; and now, here was another who would be happy if she only took thought for herself. She knew it was so, by the sinking of her overburdened heart. Oh, if she had but a mother to tell her what was really right, and what she ought to do !

So she walked by his side, sad and troubled, while he was feeling somehow as if the sunshine had faded, and the laughter of the merrymakers on the beach were hollow mockery.

Presently Rosa asked how it was that they had known where to look for her, and her companion explained that Miss Twinkleton had told them she was probably upon the beach ; that he and Mr. Crisparkle had volunteered to go and look for her ; and that, after a short search, he had lighted upon her resting-place. The Minor Canon was no doubt searching still

They were now close to the lodgings, and Rosa fancied that she could distinguish Miss Twinkleton's stiff curls, and Mr. Grewgious' smooth head behind the curtains of the bow window ; when it occurred to her that it was hardly fair to Mr. Crisparkle to leave him to his fate ; and with her usual impulsive quickness she said so.

And, oh dear ! what a long time they were in finding Mr. Crisparkle ! As if that gentleman had provided himself with a coat of invisibility for the occasion ; or, in league with Mr. Tartar, shrouded his cheerful countenance in a veil too dense to penetrate. Once or twice, Rosa felt almost sure she saw him in the distance ; but she must have been mistaken, for Mr.

Tartar, whose eyes, as he gravely informed her, were so accustomed to distinguish objects far ahead, as to be incapable of erring, always persisted that she was wrong, and turning would recommence the search in an opposite direction.

It was remarkable, too, that in spite of their hurry, the sea-lieutenant's pace was extremely easy; and when Rosa rather uneasily proposed that they should mend it, he informed her that having only just "cast" his sea-legs, as it were, he found it difficult to get accustomed to his land ones; he hoped, however, that with time and patience, he might yet learn to use them with a landsman's agility. Furthermore, she could not help noticing, that his far-seeing eyes, instead of sweeping the distance, rested repeatedly on her face, where of course he could not expect to find Mr. Crisparkle; and she could have cried with vexation, as she keenly realised that he made use of the bright blushes which his earnest gaze called up there, as nutriment for his hopes. And the worst, and hardest of it was, that she could not help liking and admiring him through it all.

At length, when she could speak without betraying her emotion, she expressed her determination to return to the lodgings; for, on the one hand, Miss Twinkleton would be shocked at her remaining out so long; and, on the other, she felt certain that Mr. Crisparkle was waiting for them there, and had given up the search as hopeless, long ago.

Of course, Mr. Tartar had no choice but to accompany her; and lo, and behold! as they recrossed the beach, there was the Revd. Septimus, bearing down upon them in full sail, very hot from hard walking, and with the faintest, tiniest, little idea of a shadow on his face.

After warmly greeting Rosa, and expressing his pleasure at seeing her look so well—poor child, the bright colour on her cheeks had been called up by shame

and vexation!—he turned wonderingly towards his friend.

“Why, Tartar, what on earth have you been running away from me for? I’ve seen you twenty times, and then, as if by magic, you disappeared. It’s made me uncommonly warm,” he continued, taking off his hat to let the fresh sea-breeze play about his temples, “and reminded me of as stiff a game of hide and seek as I ever played in my life.”

CHAPTER VIII

A DAY UPON THE WATER

IN the pretty parlour, directly opposite Miss Twinkleton, sits Mr. Grewgious, waiting for the return of his ward. The poor man has found the time long. He has been bountifully regaled with a moral repast ; and, to judge by the appearance of his discomfited look, perplexed face, and ruffled locks—ruffled from excess of smoothing—seems to have found it rather strong than savoury. He is now engaged in digesting it, and is troubled by the reflection that it must be some serious fault in his organisation which makes it disagree with him.

But the downcast and depressed physiognomy of Mr. Grewgious brightens up amazingly at sight of his ward, and of her glowing cheeks ; and when she, with a little burst of delight at feeling herself safe again under his protection, throws her arms around his neck, letting her loosened brown curls play about it, to press her warm, soft lips to his withered face, he reddens, bashful as a schoolboy. But he likes it. Oh, he likes it ! Proud, happy and elate, he enters into a mental calculation as to how much Mr. Crisparkle would give for it, and how much more, multiplied a hundred-fold, Mr. Tartar. And he forgets all about Miss Twinkleton, as he lays his favoured arm round Rosa's waist, and, drawing the sweet little flushed face close to his to let his short-sighted eyes feast upon it at their ease, asks her what has kept them so long.

It is naughty of Rosa ! It is utterly unanswerable, inconsiderate and non-resolution-like of Rosa, with

those wistful blue eyes upon her ! Why, if even Mr. Crisparkle, with his heart full of the remembrance of another girlish figure ; with tender recollections of other warm lips upon his hand ; with eyes softening even now at the thought of other dark eyes, so haughty and resolute for the rest of the world, so gentle and submissive when they meet his—why, if even Mr. Crisparkle looks on with admiration, and, perhaps, some envy, what must be the feelings of the sea-lieutenant ? It is naughty of Rosa, with those longing eyes upon her face !

And, alas for her resolution, doomed to be attacked so fatally this morning ! What on earth can she have been thinking of to make such a monstrous and incomprehensible assertion, to wit : that she believes Miss Twinkleton is afraid of the water. Has Rosa ever known—Miss T. puts the question with stern pathos and total forgetfulness of the Billickin—has Rosa ever known her afraid of anything ? Is Miss Twinkleton not already dressed—quite youthfully and charmingly dressed—for the occasion ? And she will not cast a damper upon the pleasure in prospect by referring, however distantly, to a word in private and in season which she must address to her young charge as to the impropriety of remaining alone so long upon the beach. And so speaking, Miss T. hurries Rosa away to make her toilette.

Now it happens that that lady, usually so discreet, has caught a glimpse of Mr. Tartar's longing blue eyes, and interpreted their unspoken words, not only without anger, but also with a certain satisfaction. Her pretty charge united to that handsome gentleman ; herself—ahem !—united to a gentleman whose moral qualities more than compensate for his want of personal attractions—what further need of professing to regard these possible events as otherwise than natural and desirable ? With the cap of the matron upon her corkscrew curls, Miss T. feels that she would be even capable of avowing,

that, after all, the fetters of matrimony are easier to bear than is the burden of single blessedness.

A movement downstairs as of impatiently pacing gentlemanly feet so alarms Miss Twinkleton, before whose lively imagination arises a vision of the yacht stranded; Lobley's sunflower face behind a cloud; the gentlemanly feet pacing off without them; and her own hopes for ever shattered, that she almost drags Rosa downstairs again into the parlour, where they arrive, breathless.

Still breathless, Rosa finds herself on the road to the shore, supported by Mr. Tartar and Mr. Crisparkle, while Miss Twinkleton follows close behind, her virgin hand resting on Mr. Grewgious' stiffly bent arm, and her faded blue eyes brightened with unwonted light, as she smiles into his face, improving the occasion, and deeming herself already in Elysium.

"This is pleasure, indeed, Mr. Grewgious!" she murmurs when they are aboard.

He is trying for some compromise between his inmost thoughts, and the sentiments which politeness would seem to demand, when a roll of the ship sends his cap over his eyes, and shuts out simultaneously both Miss Twinkleton and the heaving sea.

"The wind is rising," pursues Miss Twinkleton, whose spirits are rising, too, to an appalling degree, and who is exhibiting unmistakable signs of a highly alarming preceptorial gaiety, "and our attentive host has just informed me that our fairy craft is going at the rate of—I forget how many—knots an hour." (Miss Twinkleton lays an emphasis on the word knots, as an intimation that she always puts the right word in the right place.)

Something very unpleasant, indeed—not wind—is rising in Mr. Grewgious' throat, but with a tremendous effort he gulps it down, and once more emerging from his cap, looks about him.

Presently Mr. Grewgious suddenly and unceremoni-

ously turns his back on the expectant Miss Twinkleton, and shows her an unmistakably cold shoulder. Falling into the extended arms of Lobley, Mr. Tartar's man, who turns up at the very nick of time, the prostrate gentleman is conveyed into the tiny cabin by that dexterous seaman.

He remains a full hour eclipsed, but at the end of that time he allows the beams of his countenance to irradiate the deck again. He is pale, but composed. He is gently pensive, but tranquil. He has been tended by the attentive Lobley, who allows his contempt for the greenness of the subject only so much licence as may be gratified by stealthy grins behind the patient's back.

At a sign from Mr. Tartar, Lobley presents a bottle all round as a preventive. Miss Twinkleton refuses at first with some indignation, but yields at last to the persuasions of the sea-lieutenant. She becomes immediately unconscious of an inside, and almost forgets her sorrows. They all become, as if by magic, more lively. The spirits, which have been ebbing, rise again.

Lobley, who has disappeared with the bottle, reappears with everything necessary for a cold collation, and arranges and lays a table, with a seaman's neatness and dexterity, upon the deck. Lobley is conscious, though with becoming modesty, that this sort of thing can only be done to perfection on the water. He shows a gentle sympathy, and manifests a mild compassion for those unfortunates who have spent their lives on land, and who cannot conceive the bliss of a storm at sea. He is particularly considerate towards Mr. Grewgious, as a strong man might be towards a helpless child, and has an air about him, as if he were constantly, in imagination, patting that worthy gentleman upon the back. He flanks the table with bottles of rare wine, chosen by the sea-lieutenant for the occasion, and finally announces, with the manner of a butler-in-chief to King Neptune, that the feast is ready.

Miss Twinkleton, who, in lieu of the faithless Mr. Grewgious, has been victimizing the good-natured Minor Canon, and making him acquainted, in a funereal voice, with certain sombre recollections of her youth, when occasions, expected to be pleasurable, turned to woe, and bright and promising mornings ended in darkest night, winds up with the trite observation, "That this is indeed a vale of tears, Mr. Crisparkle," lets fall one, shares in the good things before her, and is comforted. Mr. Crisparkle, who has deemed it a matter of courtesy not to contradict a lady, though cherishing in secret his own private ideas of life, sees less reason than ever to change his views on the subject. Mr. Grewgious partakes, in moderation, and after due consultation with Lobley; for whose wisdom, he informs their host, in an audible whisper, he entertains the highest respect. The spirits which have been ebbing fast, rise high again.

Lobley, behind Miss Twinkleton's spare shoulders, lets fall mysterious hints of a dinner in course of preparation, more wonderful than the mind of a landsman can conceive.

He pours out a glass of wine for the good lady as he speaks, and recommends her to "tip it off," for it will do her good. She follows the recommendation, quaffs the fragrant liquid, and is heard to laugh, actually to laugh.

As for Mr. Tartar and Rosa—what makes Mr. Grewgious—viewing them intently with screwed-up eyes—what makes him so fidgetty and restless? Is it not a pleasant sight, that delicate, girlish figure, those graceful proportions? Is it not a delight to contemplate that soft brown hair, loosened by the wind, which, falling free over her black dress, shines there like sunshine? Or is it the figure at her side, brave, manly, and modest; frank, fearless, and unassuming—is that an object to trouble Mr. Grewgious?

No. It is the look in the sea-lieutenant's handsome

face, plain even to his short-sighted eyes. He has not seen it often, but he has *felt* it once ; and he knows, ah ! he knows full well what it means.

Good God ! Does the child love him ? He cannot see her face, for it is turned towards the sea, but her figure is shrinking, her head downcast. He hears Miss Twinkleton expatiating on the amount of the information she has gained. He hears various cries and exclamations from the sailors. He hears Mr. Crisparkle call him to come and look through the telescope. But he heeds none of them. He is absorbed in his anxiety to see the child's face, and read its meaning if he can. As if he were her father—and no father could feel more tenderly, more lovingly towards the little creature, whom he loves for *her* dear sake—he thinks of her at this moment only as “ the child.”

At last he sees it ; pale, troubled, with the tears trembling on her dark lashes, and with quivering lips. What has he been saying to her ?

Mr. Grewgious does not wait to answer his own question, but hurries across the deck, reckless of his unhappy propensity for running foul of everything in his way, and almost capsizing the telescope and the Minor Canon ; and for the rest of the day he does not leave her side again.

What fun it is, Rosa thinks, to see sure-footed Mr. Crisparkle cross the deck, so uncertain and so slow. And to see Miss Twinkleton give it up at the first step and fall plump into Lobley's tattooed arms. And to feel herself reeling and staggering like a drunken man, when she makes the experiment herself. Oh, the fun and frolic of that day upon the water !

And when the sun sets, going down into the deep blue water like a ball of molten gold, dyeing the heavens deep red and purple in its passage, and lighting up the whole great ocean with tints of gold !

And in the mysterious twilight, almost windstill, when the sailors, incited by Lobley, sing snatches of

wild sea-songs, weird and strange to hear ; when Mr. Tartar appears in the character of a first-rate tenor, and Mr. Crisparkle gives them the essence of the " Alternate Musical Wednesdays," in his cheerful bass, Mr. Grewgious joining in, and, taking the will for the deed, not badly either, in the chorus ; when Rosa's fresh voice sings a sweet song of love ; and even Miss Twinkleton contributes her mite in a sentimental ballad of her girlhood, the substance of which is, emphatically, that " Men are false, and women are fair." Oh, the happiness, and sweet, sweet peace of that day upon the water !

It is over at last. The gentlemen are gone their various ways, and Rosa and Miss Twinkleton are alone again in their lodgings. Late as it is, the elder lady would like to improve the occasion, but Rosa, somewhat stormily pleading great weariness, is finally (not without a struggle) permitted to retire for the night, unimproved and unreprieved. The fight between inclination and duty has been fought out to the end, and Rosa's wishes have been conquered by Rosa's sense of duty. As she lays her weary head upon the pillow, her slight frame trembles with emotion that is not joy, and her cheeks are wet with scalding drops, which she cannot persuade even herself to be tears of happiness.

CHAPTER IX

THE PLACE IS HAUNTED !

A STRANGE rumour has sprung up in Cloisterham (always, by-the-by, a fruitful and well prepared bed for such a growth, by reason of its chronic drowsiness), and has developed with such amazing rapidity that it has become, as it were, a stately tree, overshadowing the whole community, before anyone has thought of attacking its young life, and nipping it in the bud. A sort of Upas tree, diffusing sickly vapours all around, and destroying every plant of healthier growth in its vicinity ; and not only overwhelming Cloisterham, but extending beyond the confines of that ancient city, and tainting with its poisonous breath the country for miles on every side. Passers through the town suck in the poison on the road there, and becoming deeply and mortally affected during the transit, carry it out with them far beyond. Swarthy labourers, housing the golden harvest, relate it to new comers, with loud guffaws of disbelief, in the burning sunshine ; but huddle together when the evening comes, like a flock of sheep, and not one would risk, on any account, being left alone in the solitary field, where the harvest moon is shining. Errant schoolboys, heedless of the master's threatening rod, linger behind in shady lanes, to whisper it into the ears of their fellows, round-eyed and open-mouthed, with wonder. Old wives and young maids ; old maids and young wives, forget old heart-burnings, and cackle about it over a friendly cup of tea, with weird delight in its horrors, as only the much maligned female sex *can* cackle. Sturdy citizens of

Cloisterham, foaming over with it in emulation of their foaming beer, gather together in cozy bar-rooms, and, drinking an extra pot or two, to give it seasoning, confide to each other their various informations concerning it ; then stagger home at midnight, irate and out of pocket, to scold their expectant wives for having chattered about the same thing at home, and finally go heavily to bed, to dream mayhap, in remembrance of their late waking propensity, of *two* ghosts instead of one.

For it is a ghost which troubles Cloisterham. A ghost raised up, no one knows by whose agency, and refusing with the tenacity of a shadow, to be laid again. "The place is haunted !"

Not by long dead monk or nun, committed "dust to dust and ashes to ashes," centuries ago, and putting itself together, God knows how ! with most unpardonable self-conceit, in order to present itself to public scrutiny, when its time for being taken notice of, and of taking notice, is past long years before. Not by any of the "old uns" : far too wise now to meddle with the often dirty affairs of mortals, with which they soiled their fingers, in the times when they were, they rest peacefully in their coffins under the vaults, until pitched into by Durdles or his satellites, then turn to dust without a moment's notice, or a moment's inclination to resist their fate. Shrinking from public notice, instead of courting it, they sleep a dreamless sleep in their prison houses, and enjoy deep unconscious rest after their short span of life ; rest from toil and care ; rest from fierce passions and ambitions ; rest from cruel oppression of their fellow-men ; rest from crimes unrevealed, which only the last great day will bring to light. And till that summons comes, they sleep undisturbed and undisturbing, leaving their successors to live out their little day, until their night comes too, as they did before them.

What is it then that haunts Cloisterham ? Rumour

can tell you, for Rumour knows all about it ; gets entangled sometimes in the fullness of its information ; running risk of tripping up, or being tripped up, like a naughty boy telling a story. Rumour can tell you that a female, tall, sepulchral-looking—most natural for one, who spends her day time in a sepulchre—clothed in white—(of course ! what ghost would appear in a black garment ! its object being to be seen, one would suppose, or why turn out at all ? and clothing of a sombre hue being undiscernible by mortal vision in the dead of night)—and in flowing garments ; in short, with every indispensable to make it thoroughbred and indisputably legitimate ; and always on view at midnight in the churchyard, or in the Cathedral, “ a singing ghostly songs,” or in the vaults, “ screeching like an out-and-outer,” or stalking about Cloisterham on particularly dark nights. Rumour has seen it often, as plain as plain, nay, much plainer. Rumour has heard it wailing, like ten thousand horrors, in the Cathedral. What, you don’t believe it ? You pucker up your lips, and wrinkle your nose, and shake your head, making a perfect fright of yourself, and proclaim the whole affair bosh and nonsense ! Go with Rumour, between twelve and two o’clock at night, through the churchyard, when the wind is rising, and mark, if you don’t hear it then ! But as nobody does go, and wouldn’t have gone for the world, not even you ! Rumour has it all its own way, and makes the most of it. Bless you, it grows fat and hale upon it. It even whispers in everybody’s ear—for it has ferreted out the secret, and knows all about it—who it is who makes these nightly rounds. Nobody is to tell anybody else on any account whatever ; which isn’t in the least necessary, for Rumour takes precious good care to perform that office itself, and lets every man, woman and child it can get at, into its confidence. Listen ! Bend your head ! Be sure *you* don’t tell ! The reverential wife ; the incomparable looker up ; the late Mrs. Sapsea !

There now, isn't that a stunner ! Did you ever ? No, you never ; of course you do ; they all never, one and all. Mrs. Tope even reports that the Revd. Septimus Crisparkle, Minor Canon in Cloisterham, on first receiving the startling information, made use of the same unæsthetical observation. But Mrs. Tope's excitement is so great, that she can hardly be looked upon in the light of an authentic witness, and having been losing her head, as she has pathetically declared to her lord and master, every hour of the last fortnight, may be supposed to have reached the culminating point at this present, and to have really lost it.

The very last person likely ! A woman, who had passed through life as a shadow, and gone off the stage through utter inability to act even that inanimate part any longer, could certainly not be expected to return of her own free will, and react it, for her own delectation ! A woman, even in life so faint and colourless, that her pupils had almost utterly ignored her, and, revelling in the extravagances prompted by their exuberant youth, had been wont to regard her faint remonstrances, and still fainter penalties, as of hardly any account whatever ! A woman, whom even her bereaved conjugal partner had only chosen on account of her extreme humility and unparalleled capacity for looking up, without making even a step towards the contemplated level ! And this woman, this nonentity, who died, apparently, because she hadn't strength of mind enough to live, should take it upon herself to raise up all this commotion, and to intrude her indifferent charms into a sphere which had thrust her out for ever, and to which she had no manner of right to return ! If Rumour hadn't been absolutely certain of the fact, it would have seemed an impossibility.

But stay ! There are reasons for not being able to remain quiet in the grave, made out and fully established long ago as unanswerable ones, to which even a departed spirit must submit, and which may be

strong enough to compel it to return, willing or unwilling, to the scenes of its former sins or sorrows ; either to do penance on earth, for crimes committed there, or to reveal to mortals the mystery of crimes perpetrated on itself, which they must avenge. Is it one of these reasons, or is it any other, that is influencing the late Mrs. Sapsea ?

Or is it her modesty, perhaps, which is the cause of her restlessness ? Does that high-sounding epitaph, attracting so much of public attention, appeal to her sense of her deficiencies, and, disturbing her rest, even in the tomb, drive her forth to wander. Or is the contradictory spirit of her sex aroused, even at this late period, prompting her *because* she had enjoyed so little of popular attention during her lifetime, to determine to possess it afterwards. Who can decide between these conjectures ? Not muddle-headed Cloisterham ! Not many-tongued Rumour, who proposes a new solution every day. And this is the great point now under consideration ; for as to the *fact* of her reappearance, Rumour is considered, on all hands, to have proved that beyond a doubt.

Two people in Cloisterham at this time, next to the ghost, absorb the greater part of popular attention—the stonemason, Durdles, and his stoner-in-chief, the ragged Deputy. The latter, indeed, is so in vogue, that he might have eclipsed even Rumour, were it not that that vague individual, finding his reputation in danger, cunningly makes a league with his rival, and unites his powers to his, till they become almost inseparable. A jolly time of it has Deputy in the tap-room of various public-houses—“ none of your low sort, either,” but in houses of undoubted respectability, where, in the times that are past, he would have been regaled with nothing better than the taste of a rope’s end—but where now he is sumptuously accommodated, gratis, with pots of foaming beer or porter, glasses hot as hot of stiff brandy and water, or any other fragrant mixture

handy ; the while he draws on his imagination, inflamed with drink, for the benefit of a trembling, yet delighted audience.

No matter that the tale repeated undergoes so many and such astonishing variations, demoralised Cloisterham always has ready for the newest account the most profound belief, and no supper can be eaten without a plentiful seasoning of this piquant sauce.

As for Deputy, he has fully made up his mind, in the event of such a dreadful calamity occurring as this ghost being laid, to raise up a private one of his own as speedily as possible, completely convinced that no other investment of any sort whatever could yield him such big and safe returns.

Durdles is, perhaps, though in a different way, quite as interesting an object in the eyes of Cloisterham as his faithless retainer. He is a hundred times more mysterious, and suffers, by reason of boundless popularity, in very much the same way as other great people whose renown capricious Fame—deserved or undeserved—has sounded upon her mighty trumpet.

He is invariably attended by an admiring crowd, who gaze rapturously at him eating his dinner upon a tombstone ; tread upon his heels as he staggers through Cloisterham ; yell outside his dwelling, the while he is engaged within in that process of “ cleaning himself,” which is attended by no visible results ; and even dodge his footsteps to the dreaded vaults, where he retires sometimes, as a monarch might retire when the adulation of his loyal subjects becomes oppressive. Dozens of ragged urchins clamorously make applications for the post vacated by the faithless Deputy, and express their willingness to stone him to any amount whatever for even less than the proverbial song.

As for phlegmatic Durdles, he accepts this sudden and full-blown popularity with the same indifference with which he will lose it when it goes ; and, provided

with a heavy stick to keep intruders from too close contact with his person, swills his beer and bolts his dinner in exactly the same space of time as was his wont, allowing all curious gazers to enjoy this sublime spectacle with a perfect nonchalance all his own.

In one respect, however, Deputy is much better off than the stonemason. Thrifty landladies discover after a while that no amount of beer, although freely accepted and partaken of, can oil the mouth of this latter worthy, or induce him to go beyond his original communication, that "Durdles knowed what he knowed ; and Durdles could speak if he would ; and if folk wouldn't heed folk, they hadn't no right to wonder if folk bothered 'em."

This remark, though possessing all the high qualities of an oracle, or a Sphinx's riddle, and admitting of almost any construction whatever, loses gradually, by dint of repetition, the charm of novelty ; and the landladies relax in their attentions, contenting themselves with rushing to the door whenever he passes with his numerous retinue, and wondering pensively, as they contemplate him, what sort of a charnel house of delicious horrors his dusty coat and waistcoat cover up.

* * * *

Whatever curiosity Mrs. Tope may have had concerning the doings of her lodger, Mr. Datchery, during his long absence from Cloisterham (and you may be sure she was no exception to her sex, or to either sex, for the matter of that, in this respect, and had her full share), she obtained very little gratification for it.

The single buffer, living on his means, re-appeared quite unexpectedly, and without any previous notice, in his lodgings, cut out of the city wall under the archway, on a pouring wet afternoon ; protesting that he was drenched to the skin, and hungry as a wolf ; and begging Mrs. Tope to get him a bit of something to

peck at, the while he dried and warmed himself at her kitchen fire.

The Verger's wife threw out various little lines, with the hooks thereof cunningly concealed, but landed no fish worth speaking of.

Mr. Datchery fell to, at a juicy rump steak, with a famous appetite ; declaring, to Mrs. Tope's great satisfaction, that there was no ale in the world comparable to that brewed in Cloisterham. Partaking thereof copiously, before the blazing kitchen fire, with his boots steaming upon the hob, and a fragrant odour from some delicious mixture which Mrs. Tope was concocting for him and which he was to drink boiling hot, to keep him from taking cold after his exposure, tickling his nose, as a delightful foretaste of what it meant to do regarding his palate, this simple-minded individual contrived somehow in the most natural manner in the world, and without asking a single question—indeed, with rather the air of one who was good-natured enough to listen to her prattle, although it bored him somewhat ; he yawned once or twice quite naturally—to obtain from Mrs. Tope's lips, only too glad to be allowed to open themselves, the sum and substance of everything which had occurred in the town during his absence ; and was put upon such terms with the ghost and its usual whereabouts, that he might have risked going out blind-fold, and coming upon its haunts as sure as fate.

“ And there is some as says,” concluded Mrs. Tope, dropping her voice mysteriously, and looking out of the window into the Precincts to see if anyone was passing, “ as the poor soul didn't come to her death in a nat' rel way. Yeller she were, afore she died ; I remember that well. I think I see her still, a walking in the Close, along with him,” jerking her thumb in the direction of the High Street, “ and I says to Tope, ‘ Tope, ain't she yellor ? ’ I says. But, Lor', that ain't no proof. It may be slow pison, or it may be bile, yellor may. The doctor said 'twas liver, and he ought to know, though

he ain't much looked up to, ain't Mr. Green, as being what you may call fust-rate ; and folks did say as he was called in because he's cheap. But folks *will* talk," said the Verger's wife, with a toss of her head in conscious superiority to "folks" in this respect, "and what with one bit o' scandal and what with another—as I've a said to Tope, a good hundred time, I do believe—my head's a going."

She shook it again, as who should say, "As it is my fate to lose it, the sooner the better," and looked enquiringly at her lodger, to see what effect this last savoury morsel of news had had upon him.

But he was nodding in his seat before the kitchen fire, and as Mrs. Tope's voice died away, she distinctly heard a little snore. Perhaps that roused him, or perhaps the sudden stop in her conversation did.

He started up, covered a tremendous gape with his hand, and vowing he was worn out bade her good night.

CHAPTER X

THE MAYOR UNDER A CLOUD

THINGS had come to such a pass in Cloisterham that Mr. Sapsea's life was hardly safe in the old city ; and he was virtually compelled, under the transparent pretence of ill-health, to take his constitutionals in the seclusion of his own apartments. The necessity for immediate measures became daily more urgent.

Cloisterham had made up its mind at last, that the reason why Mrs. Sapsea was not where she ought to be (*viz.*, in her grave) was, that she had been murdered. And who had murdered Mrs. Sapsea ? Why, who but her husband !

There was no earthly reason why he should have done so ; but that made no difference to Cloisterham. He had expected a great deal of silent adoration and looking up to, undoubtedly, yet had never been otherwise an unkind husband ; but Cloisterham was not the sort of city to puzzle its head with unnecessary details.

Just as in the years past, this city of a bygone time would have condemned and burnt a witch (after first torturing her) only because she was accused of being one ; so they condemned and would have executed Mr. Sapsea as a murderer, for the sole reason that he was accused of being one.

Among the many anxious to place the rope round the murderer's neck (and it is astonishing how many competitors there always are for this odious office, which it might be supposed for the sake of common humanity one would only be too glad to leave to the hangman and birds of his feather), there were some

who even went further than the general voice ; some who even mooted the hypothesis that Mr. Sapsea had not only murdered Mrs. Sapsea by slow degrees, but Mr. Edwin Drood by rapid ones ; that he was, in short, one of those wholesale murderers, offshoots of the devil, who spring up, from time to time, to show us of what mankind is capable, and prove that if, as Wordsworth says, " trailing clouds of glory, we do come from God," we most certainly must have passed through the other place also, in our transit, and accumulated no small proportion of its filth.

Some few adherents still clung fondly to him who had been the former object of so much reverence and admiration. Among the warmest of these was Miss Twinkleton. In a constant state of flaming indignation against the public, this excellent lady found herself far less able than usual to cope with the rebellious spirits of the young ladies.

So it had come to pass that Mr. Sapsea's life was hardly safe in Cloisterham, and that he was forced to make use of his hall and passage as a promenade. Stones, thrown by invisible hands, had stuck him painfully behind, and even had the presumption to ascend to the magisterial hat, and precipitate that priestly and venerable headpiece into the gutter.

Rotten eggs had sullied the purity of his nether garments, and had laid their desecrating touch upon the majesty of his black, and, previously, spotless coat.

A drowned kitten, foul to touch and scent, had alighted upon his august head from an unknown window in the High Street.

" Where's yer wife ? " became the popular street cry in Cloisterham, repeated with shouts of derisive laughter. Placards were posted on the door of the Mayor's house, full of vague threatenings. Anonymous letters were addressed to his Honour, containing the ominous words : " Who poisoned the old lady ? "

At last private counsel and advice, and public

execration and ignominy, prevailed with his Honour, and he made his famous suggestion that the vault should be entered, the coffin opened, and the body examined, “so as to put an end for ever (so the Mayor worded it) to all these false and lying calumniations, concocted by his enemies ; who, jealous of his high renown, had sought by such means, base enough for the Evil One, to undermine and ruin him. But (so the Mayor concluded) their vile machinations would perish and come to shame, and they along with them ; and his tarnished honour would shine more brightly than ever for the ordeal to which it had been subjected.”

On hearing of this decree, the few constant admirers of his Honour, who had taken to skulking in by-ways, and hardly dared show themselves in the light of day, raised their voices again in a shout of triumph.

They had always said so ; had always known that no man alive, except his Honour, was equal to the occasion. His disinterestedness ; his complete putting aside of his private feelings for the public benefit ; his sound common sense in suggesting the only thing which could silence for ever the voice of the backbiter ; his triumphant heading of that verb which as yet had been so imperfectly conjugated in Cloisterham, to wit : Thou must put it down ; he, she, or it, must put it down ; we, you, or they, must put it down ; with : I will put it down—taking such certain steps for doing it—they could hardly sufficiently extol.

Therefore, in pursuance of his suggestion, the Mayor handed over to Mr. Crisparkle, as ambassador of his Reverence the Dean, the heavy key opening the door of Mrs. Sapsea’s monument, with full authority to make such use of it as he thought proper ; and Durdles was communicated with ; and one or two other men were bidden to meet at a certain place, quietly, to arouse no sensation, and for a dread and solemn purpose.

On the afternoon of that same day, Mr. Crisparkle,

pale and agitated, hurried up to the Mayor's house, and requested an immediate audience of that dignitary. He found his Honour complacently awaiting his arrival, with a bottle of port and a couple of glasses before him (one of which had been made use of), after an early dinner, and already contemplating with "the eye of his mind, the utter confusion with which his enemies would be scattered and put to flight before the strong power of the truth." But Mr. Sapsea's lips, slightly parted still with this sentiment, opened themselves yet wider, though speechless, when Mr. Crisparkle communicated to him the awful news of which he was the bearer. His jaws fell aghast; his plump cheeks, glowing from rosy wine, grew sunk and haggard. Wine, which cheers the heart of man, was powerless to perform that good office any more for Mr. Sapsea, and as for oil to make his face to shine, that was rendered superfluous by the sweat of anguish which lubricated his lofty brow. Helpless, paralytic, trembling, he glared back speechlessly at the Minor Canon, a miserable, idiotic old man. In the moment when real strength of mind and energy were most needed, the insufferable vanity and pomposity which had struggled (pretty successfully too, as far as Cloisterham was concerned) to supply their vacant places, broke down utterly, and left him to bear alone his ignominy and his shame.

For the Minor Canon had broken to him, gently and considerately, that Durdles' dread assertion had been proved true beyond a doubt; that the opened coffin of Mrs. Sapsea had disclosed no dead form mouldering away, but was empty, with the exception of a little case containing a ring—a lady's ring, with a rose of diamonds and rubies, which possibly Mr. Sapsea would be able to identify as the property of the deceased. That a great crime had been committed; the sanctity of the grave defiled; and the dead body forcibly removed from its resting-place. That, what had been the motive, remained, of course, at present, shrouded

in profoundest mystery, but that the course to be pursued was plain and clear, and would no doubt accord with Mr. Sapsea's wishes. The matter must be placed at once, without delay, in the hands of the authorities, and all the machinery of the law put in motion to discover and hunt down the perpetrator of the crime.

So far, Mr. Crisparkle, warm and eager, yet tender too towards the wretched old man, so terribly affected by the disclosure ; but there was no getting anything out of Mr. Sapsea. He did not attempt to identify the ring or not to identify it. He only whined like a child for his housekeeper, and when she came, frightened to see her pompous master brought so low, and full of curiosity to hear what had happened, he said he " must go to bed, must go to bed," and after she had brought him there, putting him to bed as if he were a baby, he drew the counterpane over his head like a frightened child, as if he would shut out the dreadful, dreadful news, and the cruel, cruel world, mocking him in his abasement.

CHAPTER XI

TWO BIRDS OF NIGHT

MR. JOHN JASPER, sitting watching behind the window curtain of the room he had hired in Staple Inn, and Mr. Grewgious, watching *him* with intently screwed-up eyes from behind his window curtain opposite, must both have spent a dreary and unprofitable afternoon.

“Umph!” said Mr. Grewgious at last, yawning, and releasing his weary eyes from the strain put upon them, “if he has not been more fortunate than I, then there is no denying that we have both been wasting our time.”

For a leaden sky hung so threateningly and uncompromisingly over Staple Inn and the whole wide city, and wore a frown so sullen and sombre, so hopeless and dreary, that only such as had no choice dared to brave it, and venture forth.

Many of the less frequented streets were nearly empty, and Staple Inn in particular was as empty as the desert of Sahara; while the angry wind, raging through it in sudden and unexpected gusts, brought clouds of dust, almost sufficient to have swamped a small caravan, thereby increasing its resemblance to that world-renowned and often-quoted wilderness.

“There’s nobody been going either in or out,” soliloquized Mr. Grewgious further, solitary in his office (he had sent his clerk away for two or three days’ change of air, “for the poor, industrious fellow grew quite haggard and down in the mouth, and ‘all work and no play—’ you know”), “and my pretty Rosa is safe, thank God! in Cloisterham. Neither Mr. Neville nor his handsome sister has put a nose outside

the door this whole afternoon, and I should wonder if they did, for the wind is sharp enough and keen enough to bite off that useful and ornamental member ; and really, as regards the sister's, it would be a loss to society."

Here Mr. Grewgious gave his own nose a thoughtful tug, perhaps from association of ideas, perhaps as a sort of congratulation to it that it was not under the unpleasant necessity of exposing itself to the chance of such a dismal fate ; whereupon, as the injured member resented this treatment with a violent sneeze, he punished it severely with a red and yellow pocket-handkerchief, leaving it to glare out irate and fiery from his otherwise unmoved and unsympathetic countenance, as he resumed his meditations

" Mr. Tartar is out of town, somewhere—as I could have told my respected friend opposite, and saved him the trouble of finding out for himself, if it were not the chief employment of my life to distract and puzzle him—gone, as I remember now, down to Cloisterham to visit his old friend, and pay his respects to the ' charming old lady ' his mother. There is no charming *young* lady in the case, I suppose ? Oh dear, no ! Certainly not !

" Bless me ! how red my nose is, and how frightfully my little looking-glass reflects and contorts that would-be look of archness in my face. It is blushing, no doubt, honest member ! at its master presuming to be satirical, he being, of all men, the most eminently unfitted to maintain that character. Hiram Grewgious ! Hiram Grewgious ! keep strictly within those narrow limits in which you were placed by an all-wise Providence, or you will come to grief. What a mercy there is no one here to see or hear me !

" Cunning youth ! But he can't hoodwink me, and I—presumptuous I—am the last man in the world who ought to blame him. But if his all-too evident admiration should worry and annoy my sweet ward, he will

find he has to deal with a tougher customer in me than he thinks for. And yet, if she could learn to love him—he is not worthy of such a prize, but no man is, and he seems to be a brave and noble young fellow, far better suited to her than the poor boy so basely murdered—why then—then I could be content to die and to be buried—cheaply, and without any unnecessary expenditure of money, which might afterwards be useful to them—leaving behind to the child whom I look upon almost as my own the little property which I have amassed, and my love and blessing. Ho, old skulker ! up to a new game, are you ? Bowled out of the other, hey ? ”

This last remark, though addressed to Mr. John Jasper over the way, was neither heard, nor intended to be heard, by that gentleman, who, with scowling face to match the scowling sky, was, at the moment when Mr. Grewgious caught sight of him, issuing from the doorway opposite.

“ Out for a solitary walk in this weather ? ” continued the old man, watching him till he disappeared through the gateway, “ that has a bad look, bird of night ! I’m not rancorous, as a rule, I hope, but I wish, I do wish that the wind would bite off *your* nose ; or, better still, your head ; or, better still, take you up bodily, and waft you into the river, or any other place where the world’s eyes would be rid of the sight of you, crawling and stinging reptile that you are ! There ! I’m calling names ; I, quiet Hiram Grewgious ! but I do wish that something would happen to enable me to wash my hands of this dirty work, which I loathe and abhor, and which only the strongest necessity——”

Breaking off abruptly, he sighed and fell into a muse, which lasted until he was aroused by the entrance of a visitor, whom the sharp wind and the lowering sky had not been able to keep back, and who came in with a quick eager step, not even waiting for an answer to his announcing rap.

A man of about forty or thereabouts, with dark hair and black eyebrows ; out of whose flashing eyes darted exultant light, which *would* show through and break up the studied gravity of his face.

“ I beg your pardon, sir,” he exclaimed, “ for coming in thus unceremoniously upon you, but I am the bearer of good news ! glorious news ! and that must be my excuse. We have got our hand upon him at last, and hold him tight. He is run to earth, I tell you. Run to earth ! ”

And leaving Mr. Grewgious to execute a most remarkable and ingenious dance of his own invention—something in the dancing-dervish style, though infinitely more complicated, and fraught with danger to every article of furniture in the room—and his astonished visitor, *alias* Mr. Datchery, *alias* “ T’other Three and Sixpence,” to look on amazed, let us array ourselves in our thickest overcoat and warmest comforter, and, umbrella not forgotten, for heavy drops are beginning to fall, sally forth to follow the fortunes of Mr. John Jasper.

The threatened rain had come at last First fell single, heavy drops ; then many in a company ; then a flood. Undecided as it had been all the afternoon, the rain now set about its work in good earnest, and flooded the streets and filled the gutters in quite a business way.

It did not spare the passers-by, either, but came down upon them to such extent, that even quite good-natured people, jostling together, and receiving the splashings of the others’ umbrellas in their boots, gave vent to angry and impatient exclamations. It wasn’t the sort of weather to feel cheerful or pleasant by, and it was no wonder, therefore, that John Jasper’s face was neither cheerful nor pleasant to look upon. He had neglected to provide himself with an umbrella, and the merciless rain, taking no heed of this fact, poured down upon his streaming hat quite as remorselessly as on the

umbrellas jostling him. He had on no great coat, and the rain, easily penetrating the thin material of his summer garments, must have wetted him to the skin.

Perhaps it was this fact, pleasant to none, which forced, from time to time, a muttered oath from between his clenched teeth—awful and terrible to hear. Perhaps, on this account, his face wore so livid and fearful an expression that even those who passed him in the driving rain gave themselves extra trouble to go a step or two out of his way.

Unshorn, unkempt, unwashed, with shrunken cheeks and burning eyes, in which unholy fire gleamed, John Jasper, late choir-master of Cloisterham, at this present engaged in business which he kept secret, or in none at all, would not have been an agreeable object of contemplation even in the sunshine, and was still less so under these unfavourable circumstances.

Time had dealt hardly with John Jasper, and aged him prematurely. Consumed, as he was, and devoured by the passion always raging at his heart, one might have added twenty years to his real age, and feared no contradiction.

He had turned into one of the narrow streets behind Holborn, when a lean and shrivelled hand, belonging to an old woman, who had crept into the shelter of a doorway, and was crouching there for protection against the weather, seized a lappet of his coat as he strode by.

“Lor’, deary, don’t be in such a mortal hurry; don’t ’ee now. I’ve been a lookin’ for ye, but couldn’t find ye nowheres. I tracked ye to hereabouts, and then I lost sight of ye. I was took with my cough, and that shakes me so bad that I loses sense and feelin’, deary. And when I come to myself you was wanished, you was. How bad you look, lovey. A’most at death’s door.”

And Mother Coombs coughed and spit, but still kept tight hold of the lappet she had seized.

“Let go of my coat, woman! What have I to do with you? Let go, or I shall kill you.”

"No, ye won't, deary. Not yet awhile," croaked the old woman, almost stifled with the violence of her cough, but clinging to him in spite of it. "There's other folks to kill afore me, and no time to lose in doing of it. I reckon I'll give ye the slip after all. What, strike a poor old soul, as come out in weather not fit for dogs, to save ye, deary?" For he had raised his clenched fist threateningly.

"What do you mean? Tell me what you mean or I will strangle you, she-devil that you are!"

"Now I knows my poppet! Now I recognises my pretty pet! I began to think it weren't you, after all. You've grown so lovely since I see you last; and if the pretty ladies are not all in love with your handsome mug, it only shows their want of taste, deary. Strangle me? I know you could! You've got the knack of it, you see, and wouldn't be tryin' yer hand at it for the first time, my duck! Help us! Save us! Murder! Thieves!"

For, in his fury, he had grasped her skinny throat between his cruel hands, and was queezing the breath out of her.

"Will you tell me now what you mean, villainous hag? Or shall I kick you to the devil on the spot?"

"No, lovey," gasped the woman, who had scrambled to her feet during the short struggle, and who now stood panting and glaring at him with eyes full of hatred and malice, "not there, 'cause there you'd be a followin' me quick and certain, and I'd rayther see the last on ye here."

"Why do you enrage me so, then? Don't you see that I'm wet through and shaking with cold? Don't you see that I am mad?"

"That conviction have been a coming into my brain," answered the woman, composedly, "since I heerd ye, deary; for ye must be mad to behave so to me—to me, who with a single word, could get ye hung."

And, as again with a bitter oath, he turned upon her,

menacingly, she was in the middle of the street in a moment, in spite of her age and decrepitude ; ready, if he touched her, to shriek for help.

“ Accursed babbler ! what have you got to say to me ? Scum of hell ! tell me what it is, or I swear I’ll shed your blood, even if it cost me my own. Speak, and you shall have a piece of gold for every word.”

“ There now, that’s my poppet ! ” said the woman, drawing nearer again, and leering well satisfied into his face. “ Now ye talks reason ; and I’ll not only listen to ye, but I’ll tell ye what ye wants to know. ’Tis too far to the old court, deary, in this drenching rain ; let us go into some tavern where we can warm ourselves and dry ourselves, and with a glass of summut hot, thaw the life-blood freezing in our veins. Is them your views, ducky ? ”

“ As you will,” he answered, sullenly, following her into a low public-house ; and a few minutes afterwards they were seated together in a room, where a fire was burning, with a couple of glasses and a bottle of something upon a table before them, from which the woman was quaffing with evident satisfaction.

“ Now this is what I calls comfort,” began the woman. “ It’s gin, and good stuff, too, deary. Take a glass, and it’ll warm ye and cheer ye up, for ye’re drefful low now ; awful in the dumps, lovey. A pipe would do it better, but I haven’t got a bit of opium, more’s the pity ! Customers is rare, since ye went, deary, and if ye could ha’ known how I’ve fretted and worried after ye, ye wouldn’t have had the heart to stay away so long ; and ye wouldn’t have looked like that neither, if ye’d smoke a pipe, mixed by the only soul in the great city who knows how to do it. I might have starved but for a piece of good luck which come to me quite——”

“ Quite what ? ” he enquired, mechanically, as she hesitated.

He had sunk into a chair by the fire, which was drawing out great clouds of steam from his drenched

clothes ; and either this or the warmth of the close, unaired room, misty still with the smoke from the pipes of its former occupants, seemed to have almost stupefied him.

There was no trace now of the fury which had raged within him in the street. In a sort of lethargy, with his heavy head sunk low upon his breast, he appeared scarcely to heed, or to listen to what she was saying.

"Quite unexpected, deary ; like manner in the wilderness. How pleasant it is here, ain't it ? We're good friends now, ain't we, deary ? You was riled, and so was I ; for the wet, and the rain, and the cold, and the hunger is riling, deary, and we ain't the fust neither that it's angered. But I knows my poppet ! Bless ye, I wasn't born yesterday ! And now, lovey, if ye's warmed and cheered, let's see the money ye spoke of."

"What did you mean by saying you could get me hung, woman ? " he said at last, seemingly remembering that he had come there to hear that, and making a violent effort to overcome the stupor which was laming thought and sense.

"Softly, softly ! lovey. Not so loud, not so quick ! There's ears outside as can hear, and tongues as can repeat ! Ye always was too quick for me, but I goes slow and sure. I'm old enough to be yer granny, and I'm sure as I loves ye as sich, and I says : slow and sure. First let us see the money, ducky."

"Curse you ! Haven't I told you that I mean to pay you ? Do you doubt my word ? "

"Lord love and save us ; no, my poppet ! You's a man of your word, you is. A man of word and deed. I knows that. But the sight of the money stimmilates me, deary, gives me voice and langvidge. I'm a pore old soul, I am, and needs stimmilants. I can't do without 'em. Just let's see the gold."

Drawing out a little bag of money, he laid it on the

table before her, while she, with greedy, staring eyes, and clutching hands, grinned delightedly.

"Count it out, my duck ! Let me see the bright colour of it, and the sparkle. It ain't so good as opium, but it's the next best thing, for it will buy it, lovey. Ye promised me a bit of gold for every word, but I won't be so hard upon ye as that. *I* ain't miserly. I'll give ye a lot of words into the bargain and never reckon 'em up with ye. Count it, lovey, and don't ye be afeared of my takin' it before ye're satisfied. I've got summut to tell ye, remember that ! I'll save ye from a tighter squeeze round yer throat than you giv' me, or than ever yer true love give you, I will."

But as he still remained silent and immovable, she went on again.

"Tell us, lovey, is ye married ? Does yer true love love ye still, or have ye got another ? "

"What true love ? "

"Lor', my memory's goin', deary ; but I can make a shift to say, I reckon, 'cause you said it so often. Let me see : Polly, Jenny, Rosy. Yes, I know now. Of course, I do, I ought to. Pretty Rosy ! Hangel Rosy ! Henchanting Rosy ! "

"Woman, if you continue to torture me," he cried, with a sudden return of fury and with gnashing teeth, "if you do not speak soon and say what you mean, I swear to you by the God above us, if there is one ; by the devil in our hearts and all around us, that I will tear the heart out of your living body, and murder you where you sit."

"O, my ducky, how bad you needs the pipe ! How you've been a wasting and a wearing yourself out for want of it ! What a mortal pity as we ain't at 'ome where I could give ye one ! Will ye count it out, or will ye not, deary ? " (coaxingly).

Even in the midst of his mortal agony, and fierce eagerness to hear what she had to say, he had sense enough to feel that he must humour her ; and with

trembling hands he counted out the money, and set it before her ; two little heaps of gold.

" Six big ones and eight little ones," counted the woman after him. " Ten big ones in all. It ain't much, deary."

" It is all I have."

" All you have ! and the rich nevvv dead ! The nevvv who left you his fortun', and his sweetheart into the bargain. O, fie upon ye ! "

" What do you know about my nephew ? "

" Don't touch me, deary. I'll screech if ye do, and tell 'em outside where the nevvv is, and who put him there. There's people seekin' of him 'igh and low, and if ye comes a hinch nearer to me, I'll tell it to the whole world. O, but ye're a clever one, deary ! A d——d clever one ! "

" Have you issued from hell to bind me to the rack ? Did Satan beget you ? "

" If he did, you're my brother, lovey, sure and certain, and ought to be my friend. But I'll trust ye, deary. *I* ain't niggardly. Look you here ! Don't stay another day in London, deary, but pack up all ye've got, and make off with yerself, across the seas to Ameriky, to cut off the scent, for—the hounds is after ye. They're strong upon ye, deary, and they've got noses so trained and fine that I bet ten to one they've found out the secret of the grave—the secret buried so deep. Ha, ha ! what a precious cute one, you is ! "

He was so awful to look upon just then, with livid face, and grinding teeth, with foaming lips, and veins swollen to bursting on his burning forehead, that even the hardened woman, watching his every movement, shuddered as she sneered—

" What a pity it is, that yer true love, yer pretty Rosy, can't see you now, my poppet ; she would be a'most ready to die of love for ye, I'm thinking."

" Woman, have pity on me, if you ever felt pity ; and tell me what you know—or think you know—

and how you know it? and I will treble—quadruple, the sum lying there.”

“There! Now ye speaks reason,” retorted his companion, “and I can talk to ye like a reasonable being, and not like a lunatic. I tell ye, a fellow come to me to ferret and to find out what I knew, and I see from what he say, that they was a closing round ye on every side. But I kep’ my own counsel, and never told him what I’d heerd ye say.”

“You lie, miserable hypocrite! you told him all. Not that it matters much. What was it, after all? Foolish visions! foolish dreams!”

“But two and two make four,” remarked the woman, cunningly, “and I reckon them spies knows how to put two and two together. And when they do, it makes a whole, not pleasant to think of, deary.”

“If you have betrayed me, miserable wretch! be sure of this, that whatever happens to me, you shall go to hell first.”

“Do you suppose,” she said, unconcernedly, “that I should put myself in your power, if I had betrayed ye? That I should warn ye, if I wished ye to be took? I’m old enough to be yer granny, as I said afore, and I loves ye as a mother. Take my advice and pack up yer things, and take them with ye to Ameriky; or, better still, leave them here for me to take care of for ye. And ye’ll send me the money ye spoke of, won’t ye? Ye’ll not forget? Give me yer watch, and the ring on yer finger as a pledge, and ye shall have them back agin when I gits the money.”

“Have I not said that I would send it!”

“But ye might forgit, deary. And if ye did, I might be driv’ to do something which would vex ye and me too, lovey. The worry might drive me to it.”

Tearing off his watch and ring, he flung them upon the table before her, with a fierce oath, which seemed to blast his lips as it passed them, for it left them deadly white; and without another word, quitted

the room and the house. The rain was still pouring, splashing, dripping down, but he neither felt nor heeded it. Baffled, daunted, all his hopes vanishing ; all his evil deeds done in vain, and rising up to overwhelm him ; remorseless still ; full of hatred ; full of raging fire, fed from hell itself, and which no rain, no nor ocean either, could subdue or quench, he paced the darkening and deserted streets till midnight, and not until all the clocks in the city had rung out the twelfth hour, did he turn his steps homeward. But not to find sleep or rest. Like a caged panther, tameless, cruel, furious, he beat himself against the bars which penned him in, with hourly-increasing fury, until the day broke.

CHAPTER XII

THE PURSUIT OF ROSA

RESOLVED to put his fate to the proof, Mr. Tartar had accepted the Minor Canon's friendly invitation to pay his mother and him a visit. Rosa, herself somewhat disconcerted by his unexpected arrival, succeeded to admiration in disconcerting the eager gentleman, by the coldness of the reception she gave him. She avoided every possibility of being left alone with him, and when the Minor Canon was absent on clerical duty and Mrs. Crisparkle left the room to attend to some household affair, the girl invariably found an excuse for following her. But the old lady, being on his side, hit upon the idea that Mr. Tartar should intercept Rosa in the solitary walk, which she took every day when the weather permitted, persistently refusing an escort, and there, when no escape was possible, lay his case before her.

It only required, on her part, an anxious look, out of the window, when Rosa had been gone some ten minutes; a fear that a storm was rising, and she believed that that naughty, naughty, wilful little puss had turned in the direction of the river. It was silly, no doubt, but she felt quite uneasy. The road was so lonely, and all sorts of bad people always about, and the days so short now. What could poor Mr. Tartar do but offer himself as a substitute for the Minor Canon, whose absence his mother deplored? And he was no sooner on the road, breathing the fresh, invigorating air of the bright autumn afternoon, than his depressed spirits rose, and hope and confidence came

back to him. He even began to thank heaven in his heart for having given him this one more chance, almost believing that a merciful Providence was interfering specially on his behalf; although it was only Mrs. Crisparkle and not the Higher Power who had been taking active steps to bring about the meeting, and this excellent lady was not quite unerring in her judgment.

Rosa had really turned in the direction of the river, and Mr. Tartar, flushing alternately with hope and with despair, soon caught sight of the little figure, walking slowly along the bank. She looked up, startled. He saw, he felt, with sinking heart, and fainting hope, the look of troubled annoyance on her candid face, which she could not hide; but it was now too late to retreat.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bud," he said, while the betraying colour dyed his face scarlet, "but—but—Mrs. Crisparkle——"

As he stammered and hesitated, she repeated the word after him, interrogatively—

"Mrs. Crisparkle?"

"The dear old lady grew anxious about you, feared your walk was ill-chosen for the time of year, and that a storm was coming," he said, with effort.

The girl smiled slightly, as she pointed to the calm and peaceful evening sky.

"And that—that the road is solitary, and you might meet some rough and rude wanderer, who would frighten and distress you. She requested me, therefore, to go and seek you and bring you home."

"I am not afraid," answered Rosa. "I generally choose this walk when I am alone. I used to walk here with Eddy—my poor lost Eddy."

The sea-lieutenant remained silent, though she eyed him narrowly, as if she expected him to speak.

"And I generally find here what I sometimes long for, and come to seek—solitude," she said, further.

"Which I have rudely broken in upon," remarked Mr. Tartar, sadly. "I beg your pardon again. Do you bid me go?"

The girl regarded him for a moment with keen attention, then said rapidly—

"No, we can return together. I have overstayed my time, and wandered further than I intended. Let us make haste, Mr. Tartar, and walk fast, so that kind Mrs. Crisparkle may not have time to grow seriously alarmed."

"Will you take my arm, Miss Bud," said the sea-lieutenant, humbly.

She had been very cruel, to him, very! She poured cold water upon the fire of his love to quench it, with steady and unerring hand. Better far, she reasoned, to nip this hopeless passion in the bud, than allow it to burst out into full bloom and power, when it might defy her. But now her soft heart melted with pity as she looked upon his mournful and dejected face.

He had learned his lesson. Surely, surely he had learned his lesson! Was there any further need to torture him? Without a word she laid her hand on his arm.

She would not have done so had she known the result. But she was young, poor child! and inexperienced, and had no one to counsel her.

What were all her cold words and actions compared to the ineffable bliss of that slight touch.

The fire of love, never quenched, burnt up strong and high again. To the winds with reason and cruel doubts and fears. He who would win all, must risk all.

They were alone together; her magical touch thrilling heart and soul, her delicate head almost resting on his shoulder.

"Rosa," he said, stopping abruptly, and looking down upon her grave, sweet face, half raised to his, and whitening with fear of what she felt was coming, in spite of all she had done to prevent it, "Rosa, I *must*

say what I came to say ; *must* speak out what is in my heart ; forgive me if I pain you, for I love you, Rosa."

Hastily withdrawing her hand from his, the girl burst into a passion of tears. Heavy drops oozed through the slender fingers, covering her face.

" Oh, Rosa," he went on, " how weak and powerless are words to express what we mean. I have thought of some such scene between us for weeks and months, and now can say nothing more than that simple truth : ' I love you.' How much, how earnestly, how devotedly, I cannot put in words."

" Oh, I am so sorry," sobbed the girl ; " so unhappy, and so grieved."

As he sighed bitterly and despairingly, the rising wind seemed to echo the mournful sound, and they both shivered as the sun went down, and a mist coming slowly up, crept stealthily over the river.

" Can you give me no hope, Rosa ? "

" It would be cruel to give you hope," she said, raising her tear-stained and agitated face, and struggling to regain her composure, " for it is quite, quite hopeless. I dare not love you."

Even as he spoke, her eyes wandered away from his, in the direction whence she had been coming, and she shuddered and covered her face again with her hand, as if she saw something there to terrify her. He looked back also, for a moment ; and he, too, fancied he saw a face, rising out of the mist, and glaring at them menacingly. But though he advanced a few steps to make sure, he saw nothing more. No wonder that his eyes played him false, for they were dim with tears.

" Dare not, Rosa ? Why ? "

" Hush, do not ask me. I dare not, Mr. Tartar, and I do not—I will not. Do not question me further. I shall never marry, never ! Leave me to my fate. Pity, and forgive me ! "

" Forgive you, Rosa ! I have nothing to forgive. I thank God that He has let me love you. I thank

God for every minute we have spent together. Perhaps the time may come when your feelings will change towards me ; mine never will towards you."

"Do not think of that," she said hurriedly, and pressing her hands together earnestly, "for it is impossible ; it can never be. I do not love you ; and if I were free instead of bound, I think I should say the same, for I have learned the misery of an engagement without true, deep love, by sad, sad experience, and would never risk it again."

"How can you be bound, Rosa ? Who has power to bind you ?"

"My own conviction of what is right," she said, with sad seriousness. "My own unalterable will. Promise me never to renew this topic. It would be useless. Only a source of grief and misery to me, and to you, also, I fear. Promise me."

"I promise," he answered in a tone of unutterable sadness, for even more forcibly than her words her look, her whole mien, showed him that all was over. He knew he was ringing a death-knell as he spoke, the knell of the first true love in his heart. But what mattered his fate compared to hers ? Would he not willingly offer himself up to give her happiness ? Like a brave man he struck down his own cherished hopes, and buried them for ever.

"We must not see each other again," continued Rosa, weeping afresh. "At least, not for a long, long time, and until the pain we are both now suffering is over and forgotten. I thank you for your generous love ; love too generous to urge itself upon me, and give me needless pain. I am ignorant," she added, smiling faintly, and putting out her small hand ; "but believe me, I know how to appreciate that, and to estimate its true nobility."

He took the little tender hand, and pressed it reverently to his lips. He dared not speak, or he must have broken down and given way to an unmanly weakness,

which would only have distressed her. But how hard it was to bear !

Never had she appeared to him so lovely and so lovable. The knowledge of the inestimable worth of the jewel he had longed to possess heightened his suffering.

"And now let us part," continued the girl. Her voice was faint, and she felt weak and dizzy, but she longed to be alone. "Leave me !" she said. "I must have time to collect myself, and I would rather you went on before me."

He hesitated. It was twilight already, and the night gathering.

"Let me first bring you home, Miss Bud, I implore you."

"No, no !" she cried, in a sort of agony ; "I must be alone. I cannot go back yet to Minor Canon Corner. Look, there are the lights of the city before us, and I am perfectly safe. I have been here alone many times before, and I shall follow you in a few minutes. Leave me, I beseech you !"

Still he lingered, uneasy and undecided. A dread of—he knew not what, fell heavily upon him. He looked back along the path by the river, with a strange, undefinable, unaccustomed sense of fear.

But his far-seeing eyes could find no tangible reason for such a feeling. The path lay plainly visible by the light of the rising moon which shone brighter every moment, and was empty and deserted. Only over the placid river, flowing calmly towards the ocean, lay the autumn mist.

And they were so close to the city that they could hear the hum of its population. There was no outward reason apparently for his shuddering—shuddering, as old wives say, as if some one were walking over his grave.

"Leave me !" said the weeping girl again.

He had no choice but to obey. No shadow of

right to force his company upon her, or compel her to return with him.

Begging her, therefore, to follow him as soon as possible, and with a solemn good-bye for ever as he thought ; with heavy heart and wounded soul, he went away towards the city, and left her to the solitude she desired.

How could he imagine, how was it possible for him to imagine, that his doing so would become a source of bitter self-reproach, and make one of the saddest memories of his life ?

* * *

Weary and worn out from futile passion and hopeless fury, John Jasper sat solitary and friendless in his lodgings, in a narrow, mean street behind Holborn, and watched, with bloodshot and haggard eyes, the coming day. It had ceased raining during the night, and the fitful wind, which "bloweth where it listeth," no longer howled and roared through the city. The sun rose, and smiling in at the dark chamber where sat John Jasper, brought out into strong relief hard, cruel lines about his mouth and eyes, invisible before ; and seemed to point at him with its bright rays, as who should say : "Take notice of these signs and tokens which not Time, but Crime, hath graven ! For this purpose, I still shine upon this man, to point him out as one to be avoided."

As the day advanced, and the sounds of busy life outside grew more and more frequent, increasing to a bewildering hubbub, John Jasper got up wearily from the hard sofa on which he had been resting, and began to make his toilette. He washed himself, for the first time for days, with great care and deliberation ; then shaved away all hair from cheeks and chin, not even sparing his luxuriant whiskers, and not desisting until he was as bare in face as a Catholic Priest. Only a blue shadow on the parts thus exposed to public

view gave token of what had been, and what might be again. His trembling and unnerved hand played him an ugly trick, though, just at last, and with the sharp razor inflicted a sharp cut upon his cheek, from which the blood flowed freely. With a curse, he flung away the instrument, and stilling the flow of blood, covered the wound with a bit of sticking-plaster, which did not tend to diminish the sinister and lowering expression of his face. He put on a new shirt, new waistcoat, spick and span new coat and trousers—all of which he took out of a drawer he had unlocked, and which had been lying there together, apparently in readiness for a special occasion, which had now arrived. These preparations completed, he donned a new collar and new tie, and finally took a careful survey of himself in the looking-glass. Notwithstanding the newness and respectability of his apparel, and the cleanliness of his person, the result did not appear, if but to himself, to be satisfactory. Even his personal vanity, if he possessed any, could not help him to deny the fact—which the dingy and dirty looking-glass failed to conceal—that he was not pleasant to look at. The jetty blackness of his hair ; the deep, dark shadows under his eyes ; the lurid light which shone out of those eyes themselves, contrasted in a sinister and Mephistophelian manner with the sallow and sickly pallor of his face. He had been a good-looking man a few months ago ; he was a very ill-looking man now.

His eyes wandered away from that reflection of himself in the mirror, and fell upon the open razor, lying still upon the table. A sudden and impulsive thought rushed into his brain, and the truthful looking-glass reflected back the hot colour which instantaneously suffused his livid face. Should he end the struggle then and there ?—that thing was sharp enough ! A scratch across his throat, one vein severed at his wrist, and the world and its troubles, its tortures and its fierce conflicts, would flow away from him for ever with his

flowing blood. He had heard that it was an easy death to die. He took up the razor, and felt its keen, sharp edge.

But the next moment he dashed it down again with an oath, "What, lose her, and let them triumph?" he muttered. "No, not so long as there is a devil to help me."

Going up to the shabby mantelpiece, beside which hung a moth-eaten and nearly worn out bell-rope, he gave the summons for his breakfast.

He ate little, and that little without appetite. The tea was weak and tasteless, the roll doughy, the butter disgusting. But the most costly viands would not have tempted him.

He poured out a glass of brandy, and took a long draught. Ah, that was what he needed! It gave him new strength and new courage. His hand became steady; his drooping form straightened itself. He was able to complete his preparations. Unlocking another drawer, he took out of it a small box, padlocked. It contained money—bank notes; gold and silver in little rolls. He counted it out with a hand almost firm and steady now, and his face assumed a satisfied and triumphant expression as he did so.

"It is enough!" he said in a low voice. "The proceeds of the sale of my connection in Cloisterham; that money which the infernal lawyer made such difficulty about giving me; the little I have saved by long years of drudgery. Curse it all! No, bless it, for it is enough!"

He tied the notes together and put them in the breast pocket of his coat; distributed the rolls of gold in other receptacles about his person, and dropped the silver loose into the pockets of his trousers; smiling and singing in a low, sweet voice as he did so. He was quite calm and serene now; and might have been simply dressing himself for service at the Cathedral, so composed and orderly was his demeanour.

He was tolerably well weighted by this time, but he added a loaded revolver, and took another draught of brandy.

For reasons of his own—perhaps only to stretch his cramped limbs after long and close watching of the house which Neville and Helena inhabited—Mr. Jasper never went straight from one place to the other, but dodged in and out of the intricate streets, in a manner which must have proved fatal to the hopes of any one desirous of tracking him.

Threading street after street, in the same steady, resolute manner, he did not avail himself of any of the public conveyances which continually rattled past him, as he might have done easily, but kept on, always on foot, until he had reached the extreme outskirts of the great city ; when he began to feel that his strength was failing him.

He had stopped to rest nowhere, and eaten nothing ; and having made a great many unnecessary turns, to mystify any one who might take a fancy to follow him, he found to his surprise and alarm that it was close upon the sunset ; that all the fictitious strength which the brandy had given him was evaporated ; that he was weary to death from his long march, and famishing.

The road before him began to heave and surge, like the waters of a great sea ; a black shroud to envelop him from head to foot ; he fancied for a moment that he was being wafted away to an unknown region ; then thought and feeling left him, and he sank to the ground.

He could have been insensible but a few minutes, when he opened his eyes again. At first he could see nothing, and in an agony of fear, believed that he had been struck blind. But feebly grasping in the air for something to catch hold of, and stay him up, he encountered a helping hand, and the next moment not only felt, but saw, a man standing by his side.

An old man, shabby and palsied, whose hand shook and teeth chattered as he addressed him—

"Have you hurt yourself? You fell heavy, master. Have you had a faint, or a drop too much? (with a feeble grin). No offence, master. It may happen to the best on us, when we've got the money for the drink."

"I've had a fainting fit, I fear. I've come a long way to-day."

"Sure, sure, master! No offence! I wish I had the money for the drop too much. I wouldn't stick at the drop, and never did, master. There's a 'pothecary close by; as good as a doctor, master. Shall I call un?"

"No, no! It's nothing. I'm used to it. I'm better now. Quite well again. I can stand, you see."

"As you will, master. It ain't for the likes of me to contradict you. Ned Nobbles knows his place."

But John Jasper still shook and trembled, and he clung to the old man—a very indifferent support—or he would have fallen again. It was evident that he could go no further without food and rest.

"Is there a decent public-house anywhere about here where I can get a bed and something fit to eat?"

"Yes, sure," the old man answered, "as decent a house and as affable a landlady as you might meet with on a day's march; and fust-rate beer."

And the old man tottered on before, with a faint hope kindling in his withered old heart that the well-dressed stranger would stand treat, while John Jasper staggered after, with a feebler gait, and still more trembling limbs than the grey-haired veteran of eighty-five.

"Here, friend, drink a couple of glasses in the bar for my reckoning," said Mr. Jasper, when they got there, putting half-a-crown into the old man's hand.

"Thank ye kindly, master. Time was when Ned Nobbles could have treated ye, and been proud to do it, but ill-fortune have brought un low, and he ain't above acceptin' of a trifle now."

And the bustling landlady, coming out with a smiling remonstrance for Ned Nobbles—quickly changed to a smiling assent at the sight of the Queen's head upon the coin, which he held up triumphantly—had comprehended the state of things in a twinkling ; had a glass of something to set the poor gentleman upon his feet again in a trice ; and was giving directions to an unseen individual in the kitchen, and an unseen individual in the upper regions, to get the supper ready, and to prepare No. 3 for a “ gentleman as is going to stay the night,” before you could draw your first delighted breath of satisfaction at the joviality of her appearance.

In half an hour John Jasper was eating the supper prepared for him—as good and well-cooked a supper as the heart, or rather the palate of man could desire—at first greedily, till the first sharp pangs of hunger were appeased ; then more deliberately ; and after swallowing for a second time a glass of a mixture, fragrant to smell, delicious to taste, and possessing, as the radiant hostess said, looking on smilingly as he swallowed it, properties so narcotic that he was safe for a good night's rest, which it would be superfluous to further wish him, he staggered upstairs to No. 3, and had scarcely laid himself between the well-aired sheets, when sleep, heavy and dreamless—such sleep as he had not enjoyed for months—fell upon him.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE HIGH ROAD TO CLOISTERHAM

FOR many hours John Jasper lay prostrate in a heavy and dreamless sleep, or, if, as some learned in such things tell us, the brain is more hardly dealt with than the body, that although the latter may enjoy repose, the former may never, and that we think or dream always—at any rate, one dream swallowed up and effaced the foregoing one, and they left no impression which he could retain when he awoke. But towards morning, when the cocks began to crow, and the horses to grow restless in their stables; when the birds drew their heads out of their feathers, and twittered and chirped in expectation of the coming day; when the active landlady, already in her stockings, and smiling from purest habit, rang the bell for the lazy maids, and began to poke and harass her more sluggardly mate, John Jasper had a dream.

He dreamed that he was back again in Cloisterham, and that the bells were ringing for early service in the Cathedral; that Mrs. Tope was moving softly in the next room, getting his breakfast—how deliciously and temptingly the fragrant scent of the coffee tickled his nose!—that the dreadful and accusing past was only a cruel nightmare which had brooded over him during the long night, and which would vanish with the daylight; that he was innocent and happy, glad once more and joyous; that his nephew—what an awful dream he had had about him; thank God, that it was over!—was standing by his bedside, laughing. He heard him call him with his fresh young voice—

“ Jack, old boy, wake up, ’tis morning ! Get up, lazy fellow ! ”

He threw back the bed clothes, started up, sprang vigorously out of bed, and hurried, still half-asleep, to the window to draw up the blind, for it was still nearly quite dark. It was about six o’clock, and there was a fresh, healthful and invigorating “ feel ” in the air. In the east, the day was breaking.

Suddenly, with a start and a shiver, with a rush of accusing blood to his damp forehead, the glorious vision vanished. With the old, old weight upon his heart and soul, which had been lightened for a moment, the dread reality came back. Covering his face with his guilty hands, the stains on which nothing could efface, he knew again where he was, and what he was.

There are many who have felt the inexpressible relief and bliss which fills the heart, when waking up from a dream of terror and anguish, with the cold sweat of fear upon the brow, with convulsive shudderings in the limbs, and an indescribable terror weighing down every faculty, as with leaden weights, we come back to the delightful knowledge, that it is only a foolish dream—a chimera, which has been haunting us, probably induced by an indigestible supper, or an uncomfortable position ; that we are still happy and honoured ; that the sunshine is trying to peep through our own snug window curtains, and not through prison bars ; that the wife of our bosom, whom we dreamed of—we shudder still at the recollection !—as foully murdered, is lying, sweetly sleeping at our side ; that our darling little cherubs, whom we fancied croup had carried off victims, are roaring lustily at the very moment overhead (we hear nurse scolding them, what a mercy Lucy does not) ; that the spectre which appalled is laid again, and that we can doze off once more, on the other side—for it would be a crying shame to rouse our darling Lucy ; who does not know the bliss of such a waking ! Who can imagine, being

innocent, the agony of mind, the horror of himself, which a lost soul must feel, who, having dreamed himself guiltless, wakes up guilty ?

John Jasper had awakened to the full misery of such a feeling. To the bitter dregs, he must drink the cup which he had mixed. Yet perhaps an all merciful Heaven sent the vision as a last warning to desist. Did the guardian angel given him at his birth come back once more after long absence and point with gentle hand to repentance, as a last hope of rescue ? Perhaps even to John Jasper, standing barefoot in the middle of the little bedroom, looking with clenched hands and wide-open horror-struck eyes upon the rising sun tinging the heavens with the glory of its presence—perhaps even to his strayed soul a warning voice was speaking, “ Turn back upon the path which thou art treading ! Repent of the sins which thou hast committed, in sackcloth and in ashes, and sin no more ! Even for sinners lost as thee, Heaven can find a refuge ! ” Merciful God ! Once upon a time, long, long ago, he had loved to look upon the rising sun, and rejoiced—he also—in the sunshine.

Glorious and majestic rose the orb of day, looking down in splendour upon the earth which it quickened. No wonder that the ancients worshipped and bowed down before it. No wonder that to them, this sun, life-giving and life-restoring, was not alone an emblem of the God who made it, but that God Himself. Floating up into the blue heaven, it rose grandly ; higher, and ever higher. The great wonder, which takes place every morning, before the eyes of the indifferent and unobserving, before the eyes of scoffers and scorners, before the eyes of believers and unbelievers, took place once more. God said, “ Let there be light, and there was light.”

But all light was powerless to lighten the darkness of John Jasper. If, for one moment, a fitful ray fell upon his black soul, showing him dimly the depth of its

depravity, it soon went out again. If, for one moment, his guardian angel made a last effort to rescue him, he was foiled in the attempt, and fled away for ever.

He laughed loud and recklessly : strength had come back to him with the morning light, and that was all he cared for, strength to do the evil he desired.

He dressed himself, went downstairs, and ordered breakfast. It was soon ready, and he ate, if not heartily, at any rate abundantly, for he was determined not to run the risk again of fainting on the road. Then he paid the ever-smiling landlady, and set off to walk again, taking the high road which led to Cloisterham.

It was not strange that he should feel a wish to revisit his old home, and old acquaintances ; but it was singular that he should choose to walk there, when the place was so easily accessible by means of the railroad and the coach ; or if, for old acquaintance' sake, he preferred the road upon which he had trudged weary footed many a time in his younger days, but with a lighter heart then, why did he not hire a vehicle of some kind, and drive there ? Why, indeed ?

He had not gone very far, when he saw before him a young man, also walking in the same direction, who turned round at the sound of footsteps behind him, and then stooped to pick a late flower by the hedgeside. A dark, spare man with shabby coat, and blue spectacles. John Jasper knew the man, or thought he did. If he were not much mistaken, it was the same young fellow whom he had seen go in and out of Staple Inn sometimes when he was on the watch there. He had ascertained by direct enquiries of the porter in charge of the gate—who had no objection to a shilling now and then, though the information he could give in return was very scant—that the young man was the new clerk of Mr. Grewgious ; that nobody knew anything further about him, good or bad, except that he was always punctual and always melancholy. “ Crossed in love, maybe,” said the porter jocosely,

"them young chaps takes such things terrible to 'eart the fust time, and goes downright melancholy mad ; but Lord love you ! it don't last long ; and the second time it don't hurt so much, you see " (with a wink, intended to express that he had large experience in this respect himself, and spoke from profound personal knowledge).

John Jasper eyed the young man, or rather the back of the young man, narrowly (for he was still engaged in picking leaves and flowers) as he recalled the porter's observations. This was a long way from Staple Inn, and past the hour for the usual attendance at the office. What the devil was he doing here ?

Nothing, apparently, or only botanising. And as John Jasper passed him, he turned back again, and went slowly in the direction of the city. Whom was he like ? Whom did he remind him of, in gait and carriage ? although he walked more slowly, and had not the elastic spring of the other. Bah ! why must *he* always, sleeping and waking, be so constantly in his thoughts ; he was quiet for ever now ; could never more drive him mad by boyish boasting of his own good fortune and happiness, so cruel a contrast to another's ; for he " had put on immortality."

Forgetting in this new groove of thought, the man whose presence had sent him there, he began to wonder, if, after all, his fears were not driving him too fast ; if the woman had not lied, when she said the hounds were after him—mother of lies that she was ! He had always had this last plan in reserve, if the others should fail ; but it would be an infernal pity, if later events should prove that he might still have completed that web, at which he had been weaving so ceaselessly, and which was almost ready to catch and hold the man for whom it was intended, in its murderous meshes. There were a hundred chances to one that she had lied, in order to extort money from him.

But if she had not ? If she had told the truth for

the first time in her life (and that she knew his secret, he could not doubt, after what she had said ; he must have blabbed it out under the influence of that accursed opium) what then ? what then ?

Why then, delay would have been madness and almost surely fatal to his hopes. All the labours of his sleepless nights and weary days would have been in vain. He had made so certain that he had closely shut the door, and effectually blocked up all the windows and crannies by which suspicion might enter, and now—now he must find, that in the dead of night, when no one could have dreamed her on the look out, he had opened the carefully locked and barricaded door, and let her in himself.

A sort of fury against his own person, which had been guilty of such unpardonable weakness, overcame him for a moment, and he struck himself violently in the face with his clenched fist. His own enemy once more, for the blood spurted from his nose, and dropped down upon his new tie and spotless waistcoat ! He shuddered as he saw what he had done, but it was too late now. He was a marked man again ; blood upon his face and hands ; blood staining his new clothes ; crimsoning the white handkerchief which he drew out to staunch it—blood everywhere.

It was awful, sickening. He not only smelt, but tasted it. The instinctive aversion which almost every human being feels at the sight of blood, which is the life, he, the murderer, felt no less than others. He sat down on a milestone by the road, with closed eyes, and almost fainting. When he recovered sufficiently to try and wipe away the stains, they were dry already. He only succeeded in removing the marks from his face and hands with the handkerchief, which he put, blood-stained, into his pocket, buttoning his great coat (which for ease in walking, for the day was bright and warm, he had worn loose) over the ugly stains upon his waistcoat.

Shine down upon him, oh sun, in all thy splendour ! Bring out into strong relief the sinister and cruel lines upon his beardless face ! Point at him with thy bright finger, and show him up to the whole world, as a dangerous man—a murderous man—a man to be avoided !

Never mind ! Even if the hounds were after him, they were a long way behind. A whole day in arrear, at all events. He would baffle them yet, and obtain what he wanted in spite of them. Ha, ha, he *was* baffling them at that moment !

Not so fast, John Jasper ! Who are these two individuals, rough of coat and rough of tongue, though endeavouring to soften the latter, out of deference to a smiling, radiant little landlady, who is mixing with her own fair hands, and with equal readiness, for their delectation, a couple of glasses of the same mixture which set you on your feet yesterday and which is to keep them on their feet to-day ?

“Capital stuff, missus,” said one of them, draining his glass to the last drop, and even then trying to make it yield another, “a’most as capital and as worthy of hadmiration as the fair mixer.” And the speaker, an undersized, strongly-built man, with light hair, full red beard, and sharp twinkling blue eyes, leered admiringly at the hostess.

The other man, taller than his companion, with darker hair and eyes, and a serious, not to say heavy expression of countenance, was still engaged in the business of emptying his glass, as his companion spoke ; but he now put it down empty also.

“Took the road to Cloisterham, did he, missus ? ” he enquired slowly, fingering something contemplatively in his pocket as he spoke.

“The road to Cloisterham,” chirruped the beaming landlady. “I went out myself to see. Have another glass, gentlemen ? it shall be ready in a minute.”

The little man, with a longing look in his blue eyes,

glanced enquiringly at the other, who answered *him*, and not the landlady.

"No, William; we've a long pull, and a strong pull, to make to-day, and I'm not a gwine to let you fuddle yourself beforehand, not if I knows it, William."

"You are right, Josiah," answered the other, resignedly.

"Now I'd risk another glass of the stuff," said the man called Josiah, this time speaking to the hostess, "that the man, missus, was a handsome man. I calculate on having some experience of the ladies, and the ladies wouldn't take the trouble to run after *us*, for the puppus of one more look of *our* handsome mugs. Now would they, William?"

"I believe you," said the other.

"He wasn't a handsome man," cried the landlady, eagerly, and blushing a little, "he was an ugly man, a frightful man, an odious man."

As she spoke, William leered at Josiah; and Josiah, fondly patting again that something in his pocket, frowned at William.

"Lor now! Only think! Not handsome!" said the tall man. "But I reckon I know what missus means. Lor, I'm acquainted with the lovely sex, have studied 'em on all sides, and from all pints of the compass. Though, for the matter of that, 'tis impossible to get to the bottom on 'em arter all. But in the matter of beauty in the masculine gender, the ladies have but one opinion. A man may have the face and figur of an Apoller, but if he ain't got a beard, he's an 'odious man' to them. They dotes upon beards, bless 'em! Ten to one, William, and sure to win, that the gentleman hadn't got no beard."

The landlady laughed as she met the speaker's eyes, and laughed more loudly still, as Josiah pulled at his own black beard, and William ran his fingers through his bushy red one, with unspeakable complacency.

"No, he hadn't a beard," she said, "not that she cared about one, not a bit."

"Nor whiskers?" put in William, on his own account.

"Nor whiskers."

"Nor moustaches?" enquired William, again.

"Nor moustaches," answered the hostess.

"William," interrupted Josiah, suddenly, in a sombre and rebuking manner, "if you ain't got nothing better to say than them there remarks, hunder the gravity of the present hoccasion, then you'd much better turn your—I won't say insignificant person, William, for I never wounds the feelings of a friend, hunder any circumstances, however hagggravated, but will only say—your person, such as it is, back towards London, and stay there, William. That's my advice, William. Take it or leave it."

"You are right, Josiah," answered the other, humbly.

"Very well. Favour *me* with your attention, missus. The cove has took the road to Cloisterham; has got no beard; had on a new suit of dark brown cloth."

"No, grey," said the landlady.

"Of course, mum. Only a slip of the tongue. And his 'at? A chimney pot, warn't it, missus?"

"A dark felt hat, drawn low over his face."

"To be sure! And what was it o'clock, mum, when the cove took the high road to Cloisterham?"

"More than two hours ago."

"Only think! Two hours ago! Come along, William. We ain't got no time to lose. Good morning, missus; we shall be a coming back for another glass of the stuff, shan't we, William? But before we goes just tell us, missus. You've been a wondering what on airth makes us so curious about the cove; now, haven't you?"

Not a bit, with a contemptuous toss of the pretty head. She had other things to think of.

"Well, missus, there ain't no mystery in it. We're three of the best of friends, we are ; me, the cove, and William there ; and we are a going to make a pedestrian tower together ; and the cove, which 'is name is Anthony Green, if so be as you might like to know it, missus ; though I'll be bound—he was always up to a joke, was Anthony—he gave you another for the fun of it."

"He gave me no name at all," pouted the landlady, "and I didn't ask him for it. He paid his bill and went away like a gentleman. Anthony, indeed !"

"Well, it ain't a purty name," remarked Josiah, 'but what can a cove do ? A cove don't give himself his own name, as a rule, and this cove didn't for certain. Now did he, William ?"

William, who had been regarding Josiah with open-eyed admiration, replied, heading his remark with something quite different, "That he'd be blest if he did."

"Well, good-day, missus. Two hours on ahead, did you say ? Never mind ! Me and William is steady on our pins, and we'll ketch him up in next to no time. Lor, how glad I shall be to see him ! We are so fond of him, ain't we, William ? Won't we hug him, and never let him loose again. Now, William, will you toddle, or will you not ? If it hadn't been for you, standing here and chattering as if time warn't of no importance, we should have been a good hour further on the road by this time. You understand now, missus, why we was so curious about the cove."

O yes, she understood ! Better far than either William or Josiah fancied, and was gone full trot to tell her husband all about it, ere the two cunning ones were quite lost sight of on the road.

And George, the male factotum, and Eliza, the female one, who had been listening to the conversation at a respectful distance, had their own opinions about

it too ; which opinions they began to impart to one another as soon as the missus was out of hearing.

“ Look ’ee here, Liz, old girl ! ” began George, laying a massive finger by the side of his massive nose, and winking double winks of supernatural intelligence at his listener, “ if the first chap hadn’t murder writ on his face, and the two hothers handcuffs, then my name ain’t George, which my godfathers and my godmothers did give me, and your name won’t never be Mrs. George, which it shall be, if you’ll say the word, old girl, and give us a buss to settle it.”

Whereupon Eliza, who had been looking out for ten years or more for some such remark from George, and was quite willing to give both word and “ buss,” did so with tremendous emphasis then and there, and thus to these two, at least, the ill-omened visitors had been messengers of good-will and unity.

All unconscious of what was going on so far behind him, John Jasper, who had wrestled with success against the weakness threatening to overwhelm him, went on again apace. Something within him warned him that he had no time to waste, that he must make the best use of the strength he had, before it deserted him again. Did he feel danger in the balmy air ? Did he scent the hounds following him ?

On, on, faster than ever. He had something of the harassed, anxious look of one hunted by this time, and drew his breath in short, quick gasps. But if he was pursued, he was distancing his pursuers every moment. He knew of a dozen short cuts through fields and lanes which they did not. They stopped to dine on the road ; he stopped nowhere. He had taken the precaution of providing himself at the inn with cold meat and bread, and a flask of brandy, and ate and drank on the road.

On, on, with the bloodhounds on his track. They are coming on with noses full of the scent of him, and in the right direction now. They are far behind still,

but they are fresh and vigorous, and Heaven help him, or his own master the Evil One, or they will hunt him down after all.

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon when he approached Cloisterham, and saw before him the old square tower of the Cathedral and the red-brick houses, warm and glowing in the sunshine.

He was almost exhausted, but seemed to gather new courage on arriving at his journey's end. He did not enter the city by the direct way, but skirted it rather, going in at last by byways and alleys, which he knew well, and where he met hardly anybody. He had drawn his felt hat low over his eyes, and one or two whom he met, and whom he knew slightly, as he did almost every one in Cloisterham, passed him by as indifferently as if he had been the stranger he would appear. His object was attained; a casual glance failed to recognise him, and he breathed more freely.

Always creeping and sidling along, he emerged at last into a part where he could see the Cathedral Close and Minor Canon Corner, yet remain himself pretty secure from observation. If any one should chance to pass him, he had only to pretend to walk on quietly, and return, when they were gone, to his post of observation. There he set himself to wait and watch.

Fixing his cruel eyes upon the house inhabited by the Minor Canon, he saw that fresh-faced gentleman, the personified image of a good conscience and a guileless heart, issue therefrom, and turn his steps towards the Cathedral. He saw other clergymen, and the Dean himself, come from various directions, and enter the sacred edifice. He saw the choir boys arrive, rosy and noisy, jostling and treading upon one another's heels, and with difficulty restrained in the free exercise of these boyish ebullitions by the grave choir-master, his successor. He saw Mr. Tope, the verger, and a small congregation enter, too. Finally, he heard the organ swell and rise, and the fresh, clear treble voices of the

smaller boys join the deeper ones of the elders in a glorious burst of melody, which seemed as if it floated up to the gates of heaven.

That is to say, he saw all this with his eyes and heard it with his ears, mechanically, for all his heart and all his thoughts were concentrated on one spot, and lost in one contemplation—the Minor Canon's house, and a little figure there, which he longed to see pass the threshold.

At last—at last—he had been waiting about an hour, but he hardly knew himself whether it had been an eternity or a second—the door opened, and Rosa, dressed for walking, came out alone. He had made up his mind that he might have to wait a day—days perhaps—for this opportunity, and had laid his plans accordingly; but that devil, whom he served so well, had worked miracles for his retainer, and had granted him, before he expected it, the opportunity he desired.

He had not looked upon that lovely face in the flesh for a month—for thirty long days—and he now let his longing eyes—famished for want of her—take their full, and feast ravenously.

She was pale, he thought, and thinner. The childish plumpness had vanished, and the sweet mouth was drawn down slightly at the corners—not peevishly or discontentedly as he had seen it often in the old times, when it had been his blessed privilege to sit beside her, but as if weary and in pain—and as her wonderful eyes, so dark and soft, looked in the direction where he was crouching, he fancied they shone through tears which she kept back with effort.

But how beautiful she was! How much more beautiful than he had imagined her. If the bud had given glorious promise, the wondrous beauty of the opening flower exceeded expectation. He fancied, looking with gloating eyes upon her loveliness, that he had only faintly dreamed of it before, and that he now,

for the first time, really *felt* it—felt it like a sharp knife wounding every fibre of his quivering heart.

She went towards the river; he always following her, climbing up towards the Monastery ruin as he saw that she intended to take the path below, and going on swiftly and noiselessly until he had attained a point where he could descend without attracting her observation, and, cowering behind a few stunted bushes growing there, arrest her as she passed.

As she came slowly on, nearing him every moment, the passionate beating of his heart almost stifled him, and the blood, rushing wildly to his head, blinded him and blotted her out from his sight.

Was he going to faint again? Was he going to become insensible, and lose her, now that he was almost certain of her? He must compose himself; must turn away his eyes for a moment, for the sight of her beauty intoxicated him.

He swallowed a deep draught of brandy, and looked back along the path which he had taken, and then saw that there was some one there.

A tall, lithe man, coming along as he had done, and looking ever and anon down upon the fairy figure far below. John Jasper knew him—recognised him as he came nearer, with a bitter malediction. No chance passer-by; but one who had followed her, as he had followed, and with the same intent. It was the man who had dared to look love at her in London, and whose sentence, if a successful rival, was—without mercy—Death.

He drew out the revolver which he had brought with him, cocked and levelled it; waited in breathless expectation, keeping him covered with his murderous weapon.

On came Mr. Tartar, quickly and securely, with a light, elastic step, little dreaming that his life hung by a thread; while John Jasper, alternately watching him and the girl below, with murder in his heart, and

the means of committing murder in his hand, waited for his coming.

Suddenly the sea-lieutenant began to descend : the murderer crouching there might have carried into execution his evil purpose many times during this descent, but he hesitated still, knowing that he had him always in his power, and fearing that the noise of the discharge might be heard, and baffle his plans.

He waited, therefore, to note the result of the interview ; and thus became a witness to what passed below between the two—ah ! so unconscious of this deadly neighbour !

He was too far up, and too far in advance, to hear all they said, but he understood its import. If the sea-lieutenant had kissed the sweet lips of the girl, his mad jealousy might have gained the victory over his prudence, and he might have shot him dead where he stood ; but at the close of the interview, he only touched her hand with his lips as they parted, and left her behind alone.

Rapture indescribable ! Bliss unutterable ! Alone and in his power !

CHAPTER XIV

JOURNEYS END IN LOVERS' MEETING

MR. TARTAR had gone away from Rosa in an uneasy and ever-increasing solicitude concerning her, which seemed, for the moment, to overbalance his deep sorrow and disappointment. He had barely left her, in obedience to her repeated request that he would do so, before he blamed himself severely for having yielded to it; and would have retraced his steps, had he not feared to cause her pain and annoyance. But she was accustomed to walk alone. The country was not like London, and she was close to the town. Every object was brilliantly illuminated by the moonlight, and besides, who would think of harming her? He met Mr. Crisparkle at the door, who taking him by the arm, said: "I have received a most mysterious letter from Mr. Grewgious, informing me that he is coming down to Cloisterham this evening, accompanied by Neville and Hel—Miss Landless, and begging me to meet them at the omnibus, as he has some startling communication to make to me. Ma is busy with preparations for the arrival of our guests; she will find room for Miss Landless, who will like to be with her friend, but the gentlemen will have to lodge at the Crozier, for our little nest in Minor Canon Corner is not large enough to hold all."

"They can have my room," said Mr. Tartar. "I will lodge at the Crozier to-night, and must go up to London early in the morning. It will be a good excuse, Crisparkle. You guess what has happened."

"I suppose you are right, Tartar," answered his

friend, " and that I should do the same in your position, though I'm sorry to part with you so, old fellow ! "

The Minor Canon laid his arm affectionately round the shoulder of the young man, but only through this vining action gave expression to his sympathy. He knew how cruel was the conflict in which his friend was engaged, and how barren and unfruitful words of comfort are at such a moment. Only love and time can heal such wounds as these.

Duly—a little delayed perhaps by Mr. Tartar's confidences—they arrived at the spot where the omnibus was expected, and found they had still some minutes to spare. In a very little while, however, before they had time or reasonable cause to grow impatient, the crack of Joe's whip was heard, and at full trot, with a rush and a rattle, up dashed the horses to the spot where they were waiting.

The three expected were there, inside. Mr. Crisparkle saw them first. Had the recital of his friend's sufferings affected the good man so much, and was it only sympathy for him which made the Minor Canon's face flush so hotly, his strong hand tremble, his eye soften with emotion ? Alas, poor Mr. Tartar, mournful and subdued in the background, feeling himself sadly in the way, and yet hardly knowing how to beat a retreat, was as completely forgotten, as he was completely lost sight of, for the time ! For the Minor Canon was raising his hat, and looking with all his eyes and all his heart at a young lady's face, framed in by the old coach window ; while the proud beauty blushing returned his salute ; her brilliant eyes drooping, and her face softening into sweet humility as she did so.

After the usual greetings, Mr. Crisparkle offered his arm to Helena, who, radiant and bewildered, appeared so strangely transformed to her pale brother, that he looked at her in wonder, and almost in alarm. As for the Minor Canon, he, with unwonted inconsiderateness, was so engrossed in contemplating, with a sort of

rapturous awe, the blushing face beside him, as barely to notice how sharp and pale was his pupil's, and how worn and wasted the young man¹ looked. Long continued mental anxiety and suffering had been doing their work too surely, and Mr. Grewgious' kind heart bled as he observed what ravages they had wrought on the poor lad's frame.

"Take my arm, Mr. Neville," he said, noticing and perhaps dimly comprehending Mr. Crisparkle's unaccountable absence of mind, "and lean your whole weight upon it. You don't look over-strong, and I'm as strong as a horse. I'm an angular man, and my arm naturally partakes of this quality, but I'm able and willing."

Neville laughed; such a thin, poor, puny laugh! It had not strength to stand upon its legs, but fell faint, and died by reason of its weakness. But he felt so unusually bright and well this evening—unusually so for him, poor fellow!—and so calm and contented. Cloisterham looked so beautiful and full of peace. He had first seen it in the moonlight, and now once more the moon's mild beams shed their calm, sweet light on all around. He no longer felt himself an outcast; it seemed to him—why, he did not know—as if he need be no longer shunned and avoided by his race. He had been so afraid to come back, and only persuaded to do so by the united persuasions of his sister and Mr. Grewgious, but now all fear was gone. He no longer dreaded to meet old acquaintances, nor would have gone out of his way to avoid them. He had sinned much, been harsh and unforgiving many times, wayward and passionate. He had had murder in his heart, and fierce anger, and he had been punished for it justly; but of the crime laid to his charge he was innocent, and God knew it, and his fellow-men would know it, in God's time. He could kiss the rod, and submit meekly to his chastisement, for he was forgiven—he knew he was forgiven. How sweet was the fresh

air, after the dust and smoke of London ! how glad he was to breathe it once more.

Mr. Crisparkle and Helena were ahead, exchanging a word or two now and then, but satisfied, for the present, in being so near together, arm in arm—the throbbings of his heart awakening echoes in hers. But the girl's face grew grave as they approached Minor Canon Corner, and for the first time in his life, the Revd. Septimus wished that dear home were further away.

They all went into the house, bright and warm to welcome them, with its cheery little hostess, a beaming image of hospitality, awaiting them in the hall—all except, of course, poor, forlorn Mr. Tartar, who crept away, as the door closed upon him, with an aching heart. Nobody cared for him ! His friend had forgotten him quite, and they were all indifferent to his sufferings ! He peered into the lighted rooms, but saw no Rosa. Even this last comfort was denied him. Had it been a sin to love her, that he was punished for it so remorselessly ? He had just turned to go back to the Inn, almost wishing he could lie down and die by the way, when the door burst open again, and the Minor Canon came out, pale and horror-struck.

“ Is that you, Tartar ? ” he cried. “ Rosa has not come back. She is alone, Tartar—at this time of night—alone by the river.”

And without another word, the two men set off, running at full speed.

CHAPTER XV

A BRUTAL SUITOR

ROSA had sunk down on a little rustic seat under the hill-side, on Mr. Tartar's departure, and given full vent again to her feelings in a renewed burst of grief. Her pocket-handkerchief was wet when she stopped exhausted, and the fountain whence flowed her tears had run dry, and would yield no more for the present. She had tried so hard to prevent this acknowledgment of love on the part of the sea-lieutenant, which her duty—or her duty as she believed it—forbade her to return. What she might have done under other circumstances? Whether she might have learned to love him? Whether she did love him in her inmost heart?—all these were questions which she dared neither review nor contemplate, and she put them away from her with strong effort and determination. He was so handsome and so manly; so worthy of love, and of a woman's deep and undivided affection; so generous and so noble; so gentle and so strong (these two last qualities alone are almost irresistible in the eyes of a woman), that she avoided, with a sort of fear, all thought of him, and did her utmost to forget him altogether, as far as possible. It was this feeling of doubt in herself, more than doubt in him, which had prompted her to say that they must never meet again: although, as she reflected now with shame and distress, she had no right whatever to dictate to him, and that having declined to accept his love, she had been guilty of great presumption in so doing, and had virtually banished him from the home which was hers

for the present, and which was also the home of his friend.

With a sigh and a tear for her own indiscretion, she began to reflect mournfully upon what a poor gift beauty was after all, and how much suffering it entailed—suffering for its unfortunate possessor, and suffering for those attracted by it.

Whatever faults poor Rosa had, she was honest and true, and her bright eyes could not but see, for they were keen and sharp as well as bright, that she had beauty.

She had been undisputedly the queen at Miss Twinkleton's, and even the advent of that brilliant star, Miss Landless, could not shake the allegiance of the pupils in the Nun's House to their chosen one. It had occasioned a panic among the young ladies when Miss Giggles—about as unæsthetical a young person as ever lived—had declared openly in the “apartment allotted to study,” that, for her part, she considered Helena to the full as handsome as Rosa, and that she did not admire little women. Then and there had Miss Giggles been transported to Coventry, and accompanied thither by every mark of opprobrium and ignominy; Miss Ferdinand in particular—a most ardent admirer of little Rosa—strictly keeping her vow of not speaking to her for a whole week. Not that Rosa herself had ever felt the least bit jealous of her friend, but was always her most sincere advocate, and admired her with her whole heart.

But how many a time she had felt proud and glad to be so pretty; how many a time, she had smiled back well content at her own image in the glass; how many a time, she had triumphed in the reflection that every eye falling upon her must be pleased and satisfied; and how often she had pitied other girls less favoured than she; had shown Miss Jones little attentions and kindnesses, because, poor girl! she had red hair and freckled skin, and had even sought out Miss Giggles

in Coventry, with her snub nose and wide mouth, and petted and consoled her there.

And poor innocent Rosa, with her tender conscience and her loving heart, fancied, even as she had done before at Brighton, as she sat weeping all alone by the river in the moonlight, that she had been to blame somehow for her beauty; that she had petted and rejoiced in it, as if it were a virtue; that she had tried to enhance it with fine clothes and bright ribbons, and other foolish vanities, and, with bowed head and heart, believed God was punishing her for this. Oh, how she envied others who had been spared this temptation; how gladly she would have resigned it; how despicable it appeared to her at this moment.

She raised her hot face to the peaceful sky, and let the cool breeze of the evening fan it, as she clasped her hands and prayed fervently to her Father in Heaven, that He would punish and forgive her (but not let others suffer for her sins), and show her, in His love and mercy, what she ought to do—that He would teach her what was right, and give her strength to do it.

That appeal to God calmed and comforted her more than anything else could have done, and she began to think it was time she went home, or she would cause kind Mrs. Crisparkle needless anxiety on her account. She would just take one more turn by the river to cool her flushed cheeks and dry her wet eyes, and then she would hasten back to Minor Canon Corner.

How peaceful and soothing was the aspect of the landscape; how brilliant was the moonshine; how calm the face of Nature!

She got up, and began to walk along the bank of the river as she had done before. The elasticity of youth, and a naturally buoyant nature, could not fail to assert itself, and rose, ultimately, superior to the depression which had almost mastered it. God would show her some way of escape out of this labyrinth; she was sure

He would. She had put her case in His hands, and could patiently await His will.

O, dear! how far she had wandered, and how thoughtless she had been! She must run for it now, or Mrs. Crisparkle would never let her go out to walk alone any more. She pushed back the clustering hair from her hot forehead, drew her hat further over her eyes, and began to hasten homewards.

What was that rustling in the bushes behind her? A bird—a rabbit? No, a man! A solitary pedestrian coming on rapidly. She wondered that she had not heard or seen him before, but she had been lost in her reflections. Still unalarmed, she drew aside to let him pass, for he was gaining on her swiftly.

But he did not pass, as she expected. He stood still as he came up beside her, regarding her silently, with dark eyes gleaming fire.

“What was the meaning of this? Why did the man look at her in that strange and awful manner?” she asked herself with beating heart. For an instant her terrified gaze met his with wonder and amaze; then she recognised him, with a wild shriek of terror.

But before her cry for help could ring out into the clear night air, he had smothered it with his hand upon her mouth, which he held there, until he felt that she was silent.

“Don’t scream, don’t be frightened, my beauty! It is I!” he said, “I, who love you, who adore you. No, don’t scream, beloved, or I must stop your mouth again; not with my rough hand—pardon me if I have hurt you—but with something softer, sweet one!—with a kiss.”

In an agony of horror and alarm, which whitened her face even to the trembling lips, she nevertheless struggled successfully against the feeling of deadly faintness which threatened to lay her at his feet, and looked despairingly backwards and forwards along the path upon which they were standing, up the hill-

side and over the misty river, but saw no one to help her. Strange to say—or, rather, not strange, for it is a proved fact that the intrepidity of many a woman grows with the magnitude of the demand upon it, in a manner unexpected and unlooked for—this helplessness—this being cast entirely upon her own resources, did not rob her of her courage, but gave it back to her tenfold.

With high spirit—always dwelling latent in her, but which, as yet, had been uncalled for and unneeded in her sheltered and protected life—and with ready appreciation of the danger which would increase if she lost her presence of mind, and gave way to her natural alarm before this madman, she faced him no longer tremblingly, but dauntlessly ; and, like Una with the savage lion, shielded by her own spotless innocence and purity, dared him to approach her, or to touch her again.

He was contemplating her with a gloating rapture—which sickened her once more—and was murmuring—

“ A kiss, beloved ! Only one kiss ! No more till we have spoken. I have kissed you a million times in my dreams, but what is a dream to the reality ? Give me one—give me one, for I am starving and famishing for want of it, and must die if you refuse me.”

“ Never ! ” she exclaimed, with a gesture of unspeakable loathing and abhorrence, drawing back as he approached her, and she felt his hot breath upon her cheek, but always keeping her steady eyes upon him. “ How can you be so base, and mean, and cowardly, as thus to pursue a helpless girl ? Is that the way to win love or respect ? Pass on, and cease to persecute me ; you have had your answer, what further do you want of me ? ”

“ You yourself, my darling ! Nothing more ; but, by all the devils in hell, I swear to you, nothing less. Give me one kiss, my angel ! that I may live and be a

man again. I saw your other lover go away just now. You were less scrupulous and prudish with him. You kissed him, beloved."

"It is a wicked lie," she cried indignantly, "I did not."

"No, you did not," he answered, with a curling lip, "well for him that you did not! He would never have gone back alive to Cloisterham if you had. I could never have looked on and borne that, with his life in my hand. I had him covered with my weapon, and should have killed him, had he dared to touch your lips."

Even in the midst of this terrible scene, so awful that it seemed to Rosa as if it could not be real, but must be a fearful nightmare from which she would awake, her heart bounded with joy as she heard this, and knew that he was out of danger now. Even in the midst of this mortal agony, she uttered a prayer of fervent thanks and heartfelt gratitude to God, who had enabled her to resist that temptation, to do what she had believed to be right, and so to have been the unconscious instrument in saving him.

"Listen," she said, raising her small hand, and drawing her little figure up to its full height; the pallor of her face, and the solemn look in her dark eyes, making her appear almost like a spirit in the moonlight. "Let us be patient with one another! Let us speak like reasonable beings over our hard fate! A strange and unaccountable destiny has ordained that you should love me (she brought out the word *love* with a shudder which she could not repress), and the same destiny has ordained that I—that I should not be able to return the feeling. This is how the case stands. Is it not so?"

"Go on," he murmured, regarding her with fierce delight, "go on, most beautiful of women! peerless among your sex! and I will listen. If you bid me, I will wait for my reward. I have waited—years—

centuries, and I can wait a few minutes longer. There are no commands, save one, issuing from those lovely lips that I would not obey."

"I am willing," she continued, faintly, for her courage was giving way under the strain upon it, and ebbing fast, as she noticed how little effect her words were producing, "to meet you half way, and to bear my share of the suffering to which we are condemned. I promise you, if you will abandon your pursuit of me—which makes me wretched, and which can be productive of no other result to you—by my most sacred word and honour, to remain single all my life, to accept no man as a suitor or a husband, and, in this way, to give you no reason for hatred or jealousy, only begging you to leave me undisturbed to my solitary life and lonely fate, to which your love will have consigned me."

There was no quaver in her voice, nor tear in her eye, as she concluded this proposal ; no shrinking back from this sacrifice, this laying down of her young life upon the altar of his remorseless love, worse than any hate ; and she looked at him gravely and steadily, awaiting his reply.

What she said seemed to have made some impression on him. When he spoke again, his voice had lost its wildness, and was subdued into a tone of quieter persuasion.

"Ask me anything but that," he said, "and I will grant it ; make any other request, wish for anything else, and if it be within the range of human possibility to obtain it, it shall be yours ; but this is impossible. I cannot give you up, even if I would. The ties which bind me to you are too strong for any power to rend. Now listen to my proposal. Stay ! you *must* hear it ! I will be your humblest vassal in all else, but now I must compel you. I have been a moody, envious, wicked man, beloved—all for you. I will be cheerful, happy, contented, if you will take me—all for you again. I have let talent, genius, ambition rust away

in that accursed nest yonder, only to be near you, Rosa ; I will now use the abilities which have been given me, make a great name ; attain honour and riches—only to lay them at your worshipped feet. In the great, free country over the water, where every man is valued according to what is in him, and not for what he happens to have been born, or for what he has amassed, there we will go together. Everything is ready. I will become a king among men, only to make you my queen, and bow down and worship you. Speak, Rosa, and say you will go with me of your own free will, or——”

“ Or what ? ” she asked. She felt her senses were deserting her, and looked round wildly and despairingly.

“ Or I must use violence, and take you with me by force. It is your last chance ; speak, Rosa ! ” And he flung himself upon his knees before her, pressing his lips upon her feet.

She made one more effort as she staggered back.

“ Do not touch me. I—I know your secret. I have kept it. I *will* keep it, and pray for your forgiveness. How can I clasp the hand of a murderer ? Oh, God, do not desert me ! ”

He sprang to his feet, and laughed aloud.

“ All the more reason never to let you go, my beauty ! All the more reason for keeping you safe and sure.”

But as he stretched out his arms to encircle her in his embrace, they both heard through the still night, footsteps, as of men running, and the next moment the echoes repeated Rosa’s piercing shriek for help.

He alone heard the answer. “ We are coming, Rosa ; we are coming ” ; for night encompassed the girl’s senses, and she sank down unconscious.

Like those of a wild beast brought to bay, the fierce eyes of the desperate man glared in the direction whence the sounds proceeded, for he was uncertain what course to pursue. He listened intently ; if only

one man were coming to the rescue he might shoot him down and take her with him still ; but the words which had been uttered by Mr. Crisparkle—he had recognised the voice—had been : “ *We are coming.* ”

There were two, or perhaps more, pursuers then, unless the words had been used as a feint to terrify him, and induce him to abandon her. He would have wrestled with Mr. Crisparkle, or any two men even, in his present state of passion and strong nervous excitement ; but numbers must overpower him in the end, and tear away his precious prize, now that he possessed it.

The girl was quiet and lifeless, and could be carried like a baby ; the deep swoon which had overpowered her, would prevent any further struggle or resistance on her part, and he might even yet, favoured by the night, fly with her and hide her. It was worth trying, at any rate, and fortune favoured the determined.

All these thoughts passed through his mind like a flash of lightning, as he stooped and raised the lifeless form of the girl, pressing it—even in that dread moment, when the exercise of his keenest faculties and highest bodily strength were imperative for his safety, and the carrying out of his designs—with wild passion to his heart.

For the first time he held her in his arms and encircled her in his embrace. The contact seemed to fill his veins with living fire, and to give him strength to combat with twenty for her possession, and to conquer one and all.

Swiftly and noiselessly he fled along the path by the river, leaving Mr. Crisparkle, one of the swiftest runners in Cloisterham, who had caught sight of the two, and was calling out to him to stop and surrender himself for God’s sake, far behind again.

But his strength deserted him as suddenly and unexpectedly as it had done the day before ; his knees shook and trembled under him ; leaden weights seemed

to hang upon his feet and ankles ; he gasped for breath, but found none ; stumbled and fell with his burden.

He was on his feet again in a moment, and staggering on once more ; but he felt and knew that all was over. In another minute or two, the Minor Canon, coming on like the wind, would gain upon him, and all power of grappling with him was lost and gone.

With a wild curse for the master whom he had served so long, and who had deserted him at this crisis, he imagined himself run down ; the girl torn from him, to be happy with another, and to detest his memory and mock his hopeless love ; he himself delivered over to justice, to be punished with the rigour of the laws of God and man, against which he had sinned so fatally.

Never ! Never ! If she could not be his in life, she should be his in death. He would not be able to lie quiet in the grave, knowing her in the arms of a rival.

With sudden impulse, he sprang up the bank of the river, and standing upon its brink, looked back towards his pursuers, and then down upon the lovely face resting on his shoulder.

He had never seen it so beautiful, he fancied. No, not even when flushed with health and happiness. Her bright luxuriant hair hung over his arm and framed a face, pale as death, and chaste and pure as marble.

Tenderly, almost reverently, he stroked back the soft, clinging curls, and let his eyes feast for the last time in contemplation of her beauty—beauty which had brought them both to this—to this.

Then he bowed his head, and pressed convulsively his burning, passionate lips on her pure cold ones ; raised her high in the air in full sight of his pursuers, who stood still, paralysed with terror ; clasped her to his heart again ; and with a wild cry of defiance and exultation, sprang with her into the river.

High up splashed countless drops as they fell together. Wide and broad circled the eddies. Then all was quiet and peaceful once more. With calm and untroubled

smile the bright moon looked down upon the spot where the crime had been committed, and undisturbed over the placid river, flowing smoothly towards the ocean, lay the autumn mist.

The Minor Canon had quickly recovered his presence of mind, lost for one moment in the contemplation of this terrible scene, and, throwing off his coat, dashed up the bank, and ran along it, in hopes of seeing the bodies rise, and being in time to arrest them on their fatal course ; but he was too late.

They rose, indeed, but further down, beyond him, and notwithstanding his utmost efforts, he felt that it would be impossible for him to reach the spot, where they might be expected to rise again, in time to save them. With a fervour with which he had hardly ever prayed—good and religious man though he was—he implored the All-powerful to interpose, for human aid was vain.

As if a miracle had been worked in answer to his passionate supplication, his sharp eyes, sharpened with anxiety, saw another man further down on the bank, looking eagerly, as it appeared, into the river. And a moment later, as the bodies rose again, he heard the splash with which the stranger cleft the water.

He saw him (still running as fast as his legs would carry him) seize the girl's long hair and twine it round his hand. But the tide was running out, and the weight of the two bodies, so closely interlocked that there was no separating them, proved too great for the strength of their deliverer ; he struggled bravely, but unsuccessfully, to swim with them to the shore, and cried out for help.

“ Hold them till I come, for the love of God,” cried back Mr. Crisparkle, springing into the water, and striking out, like the famous swimmer that he was.

He was only just in time, for, with the girl's hair still entwined in his hand, the rescuer had been forced to succumb, and it was three lifeless bodies which the

Minor Canon, with the utmost exertion, and assisted by Mr. Tartar, brought to shore at last.

"She is dead!" cried the sea-lieutenant, in heart-rending tones, throwing himself down by the unconscious form of the girl; "and I am the cause, Crisparkle. I have killed her. Would to God that I were dead, too."

And he broke into sobs and lamentations, regardless of the other two motionless figures.

The Minor Canon, had been quietly disengaging the poor girl from the murderer's terrible embrace, and was now searching John Jasper's pockets to see if he could find something to restore her. To his great joy, the search was successful. He found the flask, with still a little brandy in it.

"Be a man, Tartar, and help me to save these poor creatures," he said, almost sternly, as he tried to pour a drop or two of the spirit between Rosa's clenched teeth. "Look at the young man, lying there, who has risked his life, and perhaps lost it, in endeavouring to save others. We may bring them all back to life, please God! if we do our utmost. Fetch me my coat from the bank yonder, and I will wrap it round this poor child, and you can wrap yours round that brave fellow there."

Mr. Tartar was off like a shot to execute these commissions, and having done so, waited for further instructions from his friend.

"Now take the poor lad in your arms, Tartar," said the Minor Canon, lifting Rosa himself as he spoke. "We must carry them home, and send help as speedily as possible for the other. I do not like to abandon the miserable wretch, but there is nothing else for it, and he is certainly the last to be considered."

"God bless and reward you as you deserve, Crisparkle, my friend!" cried Mr. Tartar, greatly moved, as he obeyed again.

"To them sentiments, which does the cove as utters

of 'em honour," said a voice below, so suddenly and unexpectedly, that the two friends started as if it had been a spirit's, "I says 'so be it,' and 'amen,' and so would William here, only he's dazed and bewildered like for the moment, and a born fool always." And the speaker, scrambling up the steep bank, clapped the Minor Canon approvingly and encouragingly on the back.

"You are a out and outer, ole chap," he said, "a downright plucky one, you air, and it ain't many as I'd a say that to, as William knows. Now is it, William?"

"I believe you, Josiah," answered his companion, but he spoke in an agitated manner, and looked scared and trembling.

"As for the cove lying there," continued Josiah, "so still and white, you've no call to trouble yourselves about him, gentlemen. He'll be well looked after, he will. William and me is come a puppus to take care o' him, and we're a gwine to do it, ain't us, William?"

"I believe you," said the little man again, adding under his breath, "O, ain't it horrible! Three on 'em. Lora mussy on us! three on 'em, Josiah."

"I don't mind telling you, gentlemen," said the tall man, looking down on his companion with undisguised contempt, "that William, drivelling there, is noo to the purfession, and ain't likely to make his fortun in it. Come round, did you ask, gentlemen? To be sure! The pretty creetur—for she is a pretty creetur, though I ain't partial to faymales, myself, as a rule; they're the very devil to handcuff—will be a dancin' and a singin' to-morrow like a lark, if she don't take cold—and it is confounded cold—from the water; and the young chap, he's a hopening his hies a'ready. He's only in a faint, he is. There now, what do you say to that, William? Them coves have acut off, and left me a talking to the hair, or to you, which is much of a

muchness. That's what I call p'liteness in coves as purtends to be gentlefolk, cuss 'em !

" Now, William, will you look alive and pull off your coat to wrap it round the cove, or will you not ? He looks ugly, don't he ? looks like summut as we shall all come to sooner or later—like death, William."

" O, he looks horrible, Josiah ! He's as dead as a stone, ain't he ? Blest if this ain't beastly work ; it makes my flesh creep."

" They says, as folks born to be hanged can't never be drowned," said Josiah thoughtfully, looking down upon the ghastly image lying on the wet grass, " but there ain't no rule without exceptions, William, and I'm blowed if I don't believe this is one of the exceptions." He stooped as he spoke, and laid his hand upon the heart of the prostrate man. It had been beating wildly and passionately only a few moments before, but now no sign of life was to be felt.

" Take him up, William, wrap your coat about him, and give him a drop of brandy from the bottle there." How cold and clammy is his hand ! Has he crossed the final barrier separating man from God—his Father or inexorable Judge ? Will the world, and the things of the world, know him no more ? Has he evaded human justice for ever, and is he now trembling in presence of the Divine ?

If some such questions as these vaguely suggest themselves to the bewildered brain of William, Josiah has other things to think of. He is wondering whether the cove has given him the slip after all ; is wondering whether the reward will be as great for capturing the dead man as the living one ; is deciding that he will do his utmost to fan the spark of life which may still be lingering in the stiffening body, in order to have it quenched again in a lawful way, by the last dread executor of his country's laws—the hangman.

They lift the body between them, wrap it up as

warmly as they can, and trudge away with it towards the city. William is the first to speak again.

"I don't see," he begins, "why we should take so much trouble to bring back the poor wretch to life, Josiah, neither. It would be far better, I think, if he should never open his eyes no more, for he's sure of the gallows now, if he do; if not for the first crime, at any rate, for the second; and drowning's better than hanging any day."

"I'm ashamed of you, William. I wouldn't a took you for a comrade in this here work, if I'd known that your hideas was of that low natur. No, William, I'm a honest man, I am, and I'd scorn to cheat justice of its wictim. I hunts down the victim, I won't let him make away with hisself, not if he wants to. I ketches, I binds, and I handcuffs him, and I hands him over to justice, and I says, 'Hang him up, flog him, imprison him, and make an example of him for hothers.' Them's my sentiments, William, and I glories in 'em. I ain't proud, pride is one of the deadly sins, but I thanks Evin for having steeped me in them sentiments, which was inculcated in me from my youth up."

"You're a hard man, Josiah," said his companion, shifting his burden a little.

"I am," said the other, "I ain't butter nor honey, to melt in yer mouth, I'm made of iron. And what's more, I'm a religious man. I was driv' to chapel when I was a boy with the stick, and I goes there now, without no driving. If this chap here," indicating with a nod, the lifeless body he was bearing, "is dead, which I hope he ain't, then he's a self-murderer, and went slap-bang to hell. A self-murderer or 'fellow-d'ye-see,' which I've heered is the right name for't, must go there slap-bang; he can't help hisself. He's damned eternal, he is. Now if I gives him time for repentance, he may git to Heaven after all, if he'd made away with a hundred. Thus, on the one hand, I does this chap a good work by givin' him the chance of being saved

(for what's the pain of being hanged-up, compared to the pains or damnation?), and I does justice a good work, on the hother hand, by delivering up its wictim. What do you say to that, William? ain't that killing two birds with one stone, with a wengeance?"

"It sounds all right enough, Josiah, but somehow it feels all wrong, and I don't like it. I do believe if I were to get into trouble, for all we're cronies, you'd betray me sooner than not—that you'd be glad to do it."

"In coorse I should, William. If you go agin the laws, you must expect the laws to go agin you. Lor, I'd have the handcuffs round your wrists so neat and quick, that it would be a pleasure to you yourself to wear 'em."

"And you wouldn't have no thought for my poor Betsy, who's expectin' her fifth next month, and the four little childer. You wouldn't think o' them, Josiah," said the small man bitterly.

"Wives and childer," retorted the other, serenely, "is harticles which I awoids, except when they're to be took; then I does my dooty by 'em. If I speaks hotherwise to a female, I flatters her, in order to hinduce her to open her mouth, which she does then, immediate. I never knew that to fail."

They had reached Cloisterham by this time and now entered an inn, in the parlour of which they deposited their burden; and from this moment Josiah was too exclusively occupied in using every possible and probable means, assisted by a doctor, whom he had sent for immediately on their arrival, for the resuscitation of the apparently dead man, to have any further time to bestow on the instruction of his companion in his own grand and enlightened principles of humanity. They laboured long in vain, and the doctor was inclined to pronounce the case as hopeless; but Josiah still kept on, as tenderly solicitous as the most loving parent with an only child could be, to bring him back to life.

At last, when even he was slackening in his labours, and giving utterance to a final opinion, "that the cove had been and done it, and that justice was shamefully defrauded," the doctor uttered a slight exclamation, and bent his ear to listen.

Was that a sigh issuing from the tightly closed lips? Was that fancy, or a real quiver of the eyelids?

In another moment, Josiah turned round in breathless satisfaction to William, sitting indifferently and with averted head in the window-seat.

"Have them things ready, William. Quick!"

"For shame, for shame, Josiah! Would you handcuff the dead?"

"Dead! He ain't no more dead than me or you. He's a coming round bootiful. He's opening his eyes, I tell you, William. That's about where it is, and no thanks to you, for I'm the man who's saved him."

* * *

Josiah (the man of iron, as he proudly called himself) had been right in his prediction, that the gallant young man—who, by the mercy of God, had been upon the spot in time to rescue Rosa and her terrible lover from that watery grave, to which they would inevitably have been borne, but for his heroism—was only in a faint. Mr. Tartar had been carrying him but a few minutes, when he recovered full consciousness, and sufficient strength to enable him to walk, assisted by the sea-lieutenant's arm, until they reached Cloisterham. On arriving there, he abruptly thanked Mr. Tartar for his support, declared he was now perfectly restored, and that he preferred to return alone to his inn (he was a stranger in Cloisterham, he said) where he could change his clothes, and adopt some simple precautions against taking cold, the only thing he feared now on his own account. He made light of the swoon into which he had fallen, probably occasioned, he explained, by the effort of endeavouring, unassisted, to drag the

bodies to the shore, for his constitution had been weakened by a long and severe illness. He expressed his satisfaction at having been successful in his endeavours to save the two unfortunates, and gave utterance to his fervent hope and conviction that they would be brought back to life again, having been, comparatively, so short a time in the water. Finally, he declined the earnest request of the sea-lieutenant, to be permitted to accompany him to the inn, and satisfy himself that his every want was attended to, with a decision and curtness almost uncourteous, which tended considerably to damp the enthusiasm with which Mr. Tartar was inclined to regard him. The discomfited sea-lieutenant was forced to let him depart alone, after begging permission to wait upon him next day with news—God grant good news!—of the others, and assure himself that their brave rescuer had sustained no injury to his own health; and then, with a repetition of his warmest thanks and most heartfelt gratitude, he watched him disappear into the night.

For a further minute or two the puzzled and bewildered young man stood looking after the stranger, who had left him so unceremoniously and abruptly, and who had put away all notion of thanks with a slighting motion of his hand, and the ungraciously curt remark that he had only done his duty, and what any other man, deserving the name, must have done, in endeavouring to save two perishing fellow-creatures. But the remembrance of Rosa, and his cruel anxiety concerning her fate, soon swallowed up thought of all else, and he hastened after the Minor Canon, who had sped on before with his precious burden, wisely adopting the precaution of calling at the house of the family doctor on his way, and getting him to accompany him.

They found the usually quiet home in Minor Canon Corner in a state of wild confusion and alarm. The servants were scuttling hither and thither, with no apparent object, or crowding round the door of poor

Rosa's little room to get a look at the pretty darling, cold and dead. Only the Minor Canon and the handsome, proud Miss Landless preserved anything like self-command under these distressing circumstances.

"She can't have no heart at all," said sobbing Mary, from behind her apron, to sobbing cook, just emerging from hers, to take a curious survey of the little motionless figure, so still and beautiful "or she'd have a tear now, at all events, and her eyes is as dry as a bone. Missus has her faults, and far be it from me to wish to conceal 'em, but she've got a kind heart at bottom; see how she's a taking on, cook. I ain't got no patience with them 'aughty, cold-blooded ones, and I can't abear that Miss Landless."

But Helena, cold and hard-hearted as the world from below-stairs had just pronounced her, was the only one capable of carrying out, with a steady hand, the directions given by the Minor Canon—was the only one who could take off the wet clothes clinging to the frozen limbs of the lifeless girl, and wrapping her in warm blankets, lay her on her little white bed; for cook couldn't, for the life of her, touch a corpse—the very idea turned her blood to water; and Mary shrieked out a vehement negation of a proposal that she should help; and the china shepherdess herself, although willing and ready, was blinded by the tears which coursed down her usually rosy cheeks, now pale with apprehension and alarm, and her nominal help was little better than nothing. It required stern and almost harsh words, rare from the mild lips of the master of the house, to subdue the untimely agitation of the china shepherdess, and to bring the frightened servants to a sense of their duty: but at length something like order was restored, fires were lit, hot bottles were prepared, and the work of wrestling with death for his almost certain prey was carried on with vigour. It was no time for selfish thoughts or selfish longings, and the Minor Canon was the last man in the world to

indulge in them, but his heart swelled, and his eye brightened involuntarily with wonder and admiration when it rested by chance on the pale, composed face of the brave girl his heart had chosen, and he felt how dearly he loved and honoured her.

Mr. Tartar and the doctor had entered the house together, and the latter had gone to the room where poor Rosa lay, sternly prohibiting the servants from entering unless they were summoned ; while the sea-lieutenant, feeling almost as if he had violated his promise to Rosa in coming into the house again, made his way noiselessly to the little drawing-room, thinking he might venture to sit there awhile, and await the doctor's verdict. There he found Neville and Mr. Grewgious ; the former sitting in a low chair, with his head almost resting on his knees, and drawing a long, gasping sob, from time to time, like a child who has exhausted itself with violent weeping, but has by no means exhausted the intensity of its sorrow ; and the latter regarding, with a certain rigidity of woe, the wasting and the dying fire. Both looked up as Mr. Tartar entered, but both drooped their heads again as they saw that he was neither the bearer of good news, nor any news whatever. Neville drew his breath painfully and sobbingly once more, and the old man began to murmur again, as he had murmured ever since he had heard of the catastrophe : " Like her mother ! O, pitiful God, just like her mother ! "

Mr. Tartar felt he had no words to alleviate such bitter sorrow as this ; and cold and shivering—for though he had not been actually in the water, his clothes had been much splashed and wetted—he sat down silently before the fire, which he stirred mechanically, trying to gather hope from the simile, that even as the faint spark under his hands burned up into new life and vigour, so the faint spark of life upstairs might, by careful fanning and attention, be revived once more, the while he listened, with strained attention, for any

sound from the room above, where she was lying. There was no lamp in the room, but the moonshine streamed in through the unshuttered windows, lighting it up weirdly, and making the accustomed articles of furniture look strange and unreal.

Since the arrival of the doctor, and the exercise of the doctor's authority, the noise and confusion had subsided into absolute quiet—quiet so undisturbed and intense, that it seemed as if it must draw its origin from death. Only the low, painfully-rending sobs of Neville broke the silence.

Helena, kneeling by the bedside, had slightly raised her eyes as the grave doctor came in, and then, as if she could not bear to read in his expression that hope was in vain, had buried her pale face in the snowy bed linen, trembling from head to foot, but uttering neither sob nor sound. The china shepherdess wiped her streaming eyes, and both she and her son looked imploringly at their old friend as if the issues of life and death lay in his hands, and they were, mutely but most eloquently, beseeching him to bring back the young life, almost fled for ever. The family doctor was also the "medical man" (as Miss Twinkleton preferred to style him) of the Nuns' House, and ever since pretty Rosa, a tiny, bright-eyed little girl, had become an inmate thereof, he had attended her in her various little ailments.

He had re-vaccinated her, on an occasion when small-pox had been rife in Cloisterham; had brought her through whooping-cough, measles, scarlatina, and other ills to which youth are subject; and he loved the child, as every one did with whom she came in contact. Something like emotion was working in his rugged face as he looked down upon her now.

He took the little passive hand and laid his own upon the quiet heart. Did it beat, though faintly, or was it still for ever?

With the imploring eyes of mother and son upon him

always—Helena continued to kneel motionless, with her face hidden—he repeated this performance, with still more gravity; felt the cold feet, to which no amount of hot bottles could bring the warm blood; took a lighted candle from a table close by, and holding the small, tightly-clenched hand before the flame, regarded it intently; then he held the same candle carefully to her lips.

Finally, with a compassionate look at the two observing him and his every action so narrowly, with subdued, though intense emotion, he put the candle down again, let his glance rest for a moment on the dark, bowed head, half-buried in the counterpane, and said, using the only words of hope he could use with truth—

“She is not dead—yet.”

Not dead yet! Then there is still a chance, and we must make the most of it, and wrestle once more and with renewed vigour, with cruel death for his almost certain prey.

Heat blankets there, before the fire. Chafe the cold limbs. Use every means which human experience and human skill can employ to induce the almost frozen blood to circulate again; to make the stiffening limbs supple once more; to resuscitate this image, wondrously fair yet, but which death would turn in a few short days to loathsome clay, and make it the beauteous habitation of a loving and a living spirit, as it was before.

She is not dead—yet! Then labour to restore her, dear friends who love her, again and yet again, unwearied and unwearying. While there is life, there is hope; and hope grows stronger every minute.

Death, astonished at this determined opposition, draws back, removes his icy hand from the heart, stirring now audibly, and beats at last a retreat. Rosa stirred, half-opened her eyes, then closed them, exhausted; trembled, quivered, uttered a faint moan, as if in pain. The doctor's face grew grave,

and he examined her uneasily, as he stooped down over her.

She opened her eyes again ; this time, wide and wildly. She stared about her, and at the doctor, but without comprehension of where she was. She even seemed to try to repulse him with her feeble hand, as she muttered—

“ Eddy, Eddy ! ”

She had come back to life, but not to consciousness. As the colour returned to her cheeks, it burned there with a fierceness and intensity terrifying and alarming. As the warmth came back to her members, they glowed like fire. As the heart, which had almost ceased its labours, began them once more, it appeared as if it were trying to make up for lost time, so furiously did it beat. The exposure, terror, and strain upon her courage had proved too much for a delicate frame. Rosa was in a raging fever.

For many days, the sorrowful watchers by her sick bed feared that death, foiled in one attempt, had only made a sham retreat, in order to attack from another side with renewed vigour, and success.

They cut off, weeping, the long bright brown hair from the restless head, ever tossing to and fro upon the pillow, and laid ice upon it to still its fatal burning.

They listened with agitated hearts and subdued breath to the incoherent words which issued from the innocent lips ; and let hot tears fall as they prayed to God for help and succour, acknowledging with deep humility that only He could wrestle successfully with their remorseless enemy, and imploring Him to give them back their treasure.

Day followed day, and night, night, until the time came when the doctor and Helena, the mother and her son, stood solemnly round the couch, awaiting breathlessly the result of the most dreaded moment in the malady ; the moment which would decide the question, whether death or life—the crisis.

The fever had burnt itself out at last, and the little creature, who had been torn and rent by this unclean spirit, had stretched out her weary limbs and fallen into a sleep so profound and deep that they hardly dared to hope that she could ever wake again.

Once more the doctor took the little hand—ah, so worn and wasted !—once more, he laid his own upon the faintly beating heart—once more, he uttered the only words of hope which would have been true: “She is not dead—yet.”

And she did not die. The patient, tender nurses were rewarded a hundred-fold for their love and care. The fragile plant, from whose heart the cruel worm was taken away, though presenting hardly any outward sign of life, had a little green spot at its centre still, and they nourished it so carefully that it began to grow again.

A life so frail and feeble, that a breath would have quenched it, but no baleful breath was suffered to blow upon it, and the flickering light of life burned up afresh. Again she came back from the brink of the grave, opened her eyes, and smiled upon them. Thanks be to God, ever merciful ! She knew them now.

CHAPTER XVI

“ THE SECRET OF THE GRAVE ”

THE prisoner, John Jasper, had sent a message to the Revd. Septimus, requesting him to visit him in the prison, and, of course, that good and Christian gentleman hastened to comply with the demand. As he came in sight of the stone walls and iron bars, the gloom and hopelessness of the place fell heavily on his warmly-beating heart. As he thought of the wretched man within, once abroad and free, with health, good looks, talents, and the world before him, and realized to what a condition a guilty love had brought him, a great pity for his fate swallowed up his loathing of the sin and his abhorrence of the sinner. He had felt more aversion towards the man, before this last crime, and when he was honoured in the eyes of the world, than he did now.

He tried to imagine what his own feelings might be, if he should return to learn that the woman of his affections, so tenderly cherished in the warmest corner of his heart, had bestowed her love on some one else, and was lost for him. The sharp pang which even this thought caused him—this groundless thought, grant Heaven!—raised up in him heartfelt pity for the man, who must have suffered it a million times.

As he entered the prison, and paced the dark cold passage, with the gaoler conducting him, a prayer of pity towards the Author of all compassion in our hearts rose strong within him.

Heaven help him to speak words which might bring repentance and bring comfort! Heaven be merciful

to this sinner, so deeply dyed with blood, for which earth cried for vengeance—for he had loved much !

With these words on his lips, and heavenly compassion in his heart, the Minor Canon entered the cell. They had not met face to face since that time, some months before, when they had journeyed up to London together. The Minor Canon was as erect and fresh—just the same, to all outward appearance—as if it had been yesterday ; but to the other, nearly ten years younger, what a change had come ! Twenty years of ordinary life could not have worked it. Twenty years of misery could have done no more. Bowed down and broken ; his hair streaked with grey ; his eyes blood-shot ; his face lined and marked like that of a man of fourscore ; his bushy and well-kept whiskers gone ; and the heavy, relentless chin, the thin, compressed and cruel lips, telling their own story—plainly to be read by the least observing eyes—so, one marked by God, and the other by sin—the good man and the bad man met.

“ This is the prisoner, sir,” said the gaoler. “ Look up, prisoner ; here’s the gentleman come to see you. Here’s the Minor Canon.”

The man knew John Jasper well, as who did not in Cloisterham ? but here he had lost all rank and title. Here he was only the prisoner.

“ My orders is, to leave you alone together, sir,” began the keeper again, “ but you’ve no reason to be afraid. He was wild and furious at first, so we were obliged to put him into chains, but he’s as quiet as a lamb now, and I’m outside within call. He can’t touch you, sir.”

“ I’m not in the least afraid,” said the Minor Canon, quietly ; yet, as the door clicked in the lock, and the heavy key turned, as he stood there facing the prisoner in the gloom of the prison, breathing the damp, chill atmosphere, tainted with prison breath, something,

not fear, but an involuntary creeping of the flesh, made him shudder.

John Jasper had not looked up as the two entered, and he still remained impassive when the gaoler went, cowering down upon a rude bedstead, upon which he was sitting, motionless as death.

For a moment the Minor Canon waited for him to begin, but, as he still kept silent, the clergyman spoke.

“ You wished me to come to you,” he said, “ what can I do for you ? ”

There was no answer, no roused expression in the face to indicate that the words had been heard ; yet the chains clinked faintly, as if the prisoner trembled.

“ Oh, believe me,” said the Minor Canon, earnestly, “ that I do not stand before you as an accuser, or an enemy, but as one who longs to comfort you, and be your friend. Oh, believe me (laying his hand gently on the prisoner’s bowed head), that I can realise fully, for the first time that, if your sin was great and terrible, so also was the temptation, and that I am filled with the deepest compassion for you, and will serve you all I can.”

Still the prisoner sat rigid and still, but the Minor Canon noticed that a new expression began to break up the stupor of his face, and that his breast rose and fell more quickly than at first.

At that moment, the bells of the Cathedral began to ring for afternoon service. The prisoner started as he heard the old familiar sound, raised his eyes to the clergyman’s, and listened with rapt attention. As he listened, his eyes brightened, his chest heaved convulsively, his nostrils quivered ; that inward life of the soul, which seemed to have almost deserted him, came back with a rush,

Watching him attentively, the Minor Canon thought he understood what thus moved him, and gave utterance to his belief.

“ That accustomed sound reminds you of former

times," he said, "when you were free; of old days when you were innocent; of associations which were yours when your life was not overshadowed as it is now. Oh, listen to that inward voice recalling those old times; repent—for the greater the sin, the greater the mercy—repent and be forgiven."

"Fool, you!" exclaimed the prisoner, rising suddenly, and facing the astonished Minor Canon—how terribly the chains rattled as he did so!—"hear what I have to say, and spare me those idiotic remarks about forgiveness. When I ask to be forgiven, then palaver about your and your Master's willingness to forgive. When I repent—ha, ha! I can laugh still, you see!—then prattle about my penitence. I'll tell you what I think about when those bells ring (I used to curse them often, little dreaming of the comfort they would be to me in the prison)—I also think of the time when I walked unfettered and honoured—aye, and loved, too—outside these walls, but not free, as you innocently imagine (milksops like you, in whose languid veins runs water instead of blood; who have never loved, and never can), but bound—bound in chains to which these are nothing."

Again he raised his chained hands, and laughed triumphantly and wildly. Then, when the mocking echoes had ceased, he went on again.

"I also think of the many times when I sang in yonder pile, clothed in white like a saint; when no iron visible to the human eye manacled and galled me, but when I knew and felt that the iron had entered into my soul."

With a wild and terrible cry he raised his fettered hands once more, as if he would appeal to Heaven as a witness that he spoke the truth. The awe-struck and shocked Minor Canon drew back a step.

"You used to say," continued John Jasper, "and others used to say, that my voice, pealing through the Cathedral, was sweet as the voice of an angel. Oh,

ye would-be wise ones of the earth, moles and bats are ye ! for only I knew, and revelled in the knowledge, even then, that it was no angel's, but the devil's own voice to which ye listened enraptured ; and that ye bowed down and worshipped—not in God's but in Baal's temple. Thus it is that I glory in the sound of the bells, and love to hear them in my narrow cell—though I hated them before—for they, and only they, bring back to me clearly the difference between now and then. When they chime, I remember that the bonds which bound me are burst at last ; that I have held my love in my arms, pressed her to my heart, revelled in the sweetness of her lips ; and that she is mine now, and must be mine for ever. Then I recognise to the full that in the prison I have regained my freedom, that I was bound and am free.”

He was silent for a moment, listening to the clear sound of the bells with a smiling mouth ; then, turning towards the Minor Canon, he enquired—

“ Where have they laid her ? ”

“ God, in His mercy,” answered the clergyman, firmly and almost severely, “ has spared you from the committal of that crime. She is saved ! ”

The wretched man made a sudden bound towards the speaker with raised hands, as if he would crush him, but paused, even before he had reached the end of his chain, and smiled as if amused, while the fury faded out of his eyes as rapidly as it had come.

“ Bah ! ” he exclaimed, “ *I* am making a fool of myself now. You are telling a lie to frighten me. I know she is dead. I feel it here (striking himself upon the breast). If she were not—but she is, she is—I should break through stone walls and iron bars to get to her. I felt her die, I tell you, on my heart—on my heart, her natural resting-place, where she will rest for ever now, for I shall die and go to her. You cannot take her from me. No one can ; no one dare. I shall die and go to her, where she is waiting for me. Welcome death !

welcome, even on a scaffold ! I sit here, happy in captivity, because she lies in my arms, and I whisper to her of my love," and he flung himself down upon his straw mattress, and pressed it convulsively to his heart.

But, as the bells ceased, the light died out of his eyes ; the rapture faded ; and he grew quiet and composed. The Minor Canon had made a motion as if to summon the keeper, which the prisoner seemed to feel rather than to see, for, without rising, he peremptorily requested him to remain. His voice sounded hard and cold, his bearing and manner were totally different from what they had been as the bells rang, as he said—

" Not yet, Mr. Crisparkle. You will not grudge a dying man the benefit of your ghostly counsel. I am going to make this cell—well adapted for the purpose—into a confessional, and to make you my father confessor. Take a chair, sir. It is a poor chair, certainly, neither cushioned nor padded, but perhaps you will be kind enough to remember that it is the best I have to offer you, and make allowance for its deficiencies. What, you will not stay and hear me—you decline to hear these interesting confessions of a criminal, and are determined to neglect this never-to-be-recalled opportunity of tickling the respected ears of Cloisterham. Ah, you are yielding ; I thought you would. The story promises to be exciting, and even a clergyman can't resist that. There, make yourself as comfortable as you can, for I have much to tell you.

" Why do I tell it, not being penitent ? nay, declaring at the outset, to prevent any sanguine hopes of yours, that I utterly decline the favour of an absolution, and would do it all again, if I had it still to do. Perhaps, I am still man enough—that is to say, still frail enough—to wish to relieve myself of a burden which I have carried alone for years, and to shift some portion of it on another ; perhaps, I am proud of the skill and per-

severance which I have exhibited, and want to win the applause I have earned ; perhaps I want to show the world that my plans were perfect, and admirably carried out, and that no one could have discovered them, or ferreted out the facts, if I had not disclosed them with my own lips. Perhaps it is all these reasons together, or perhaps one of them, or perhaps another reason totally opposed to these—no matter, I have resolved to tell it. For years I have lived for only one object, and been filled with only one desire. I have strained every nerve to attain it, and I have done so, though not quite in the way I intended. Never mind ! I *have* attained it, and I am satisfied.”

“It is my duty to tell you,” interrupted the Minor Canon, “that your own words may be used against you on your trial, and may help to incriminate you. Remember that ! ”

“Do you think I care to live, now that she is dead ? ” he answered, “the law can only take my life, and that is of no value to me—nay, it is hated by me. If the law should spare me, I would take it myself.”

The Minor Canon turned sick, almost paralysed with horror. How terrible was all this ! Where were his hopes that the sinner was penitent and longed to be forgiven ? In his love for truth, and strict conscientiousness, he feared it might be his duty to disabuse him of his delusion, and prove to him beyond doubt, that the girl lived. And yet, what awful consequences might ensue if he did so ? He did not dare, and he could not go, for a sort of fascination rooted him to the spot.

“What shall we call my story ? ” said the prisoner, reflectively, as if that were the only matter for consideration and thought. “We must give it a title, you know. Ha ! I have it. ‘The Secret of the Grave.’ A charming title, is it not ? At once mysterious and attractive. ‘The Secret of the Grave,’ therefore.”

Sitting opposite him, filled with terror, and yet compelled to listen, almost against his will, the Minor

Canon, leaning forward on the chair, with fascinated eyes upon the prisoner, heard this horrible confession.

“ ‘To begin at the beginning,’ as the story-tellers say, I must go back a long way—back to the time when I was a boy, about ten or eleven years of age, and my nephew, Edwin Drood, a little child. Looking back to that time, with intent to realise what sort of a boy I was, I can only remember one thing with any degree of clearness. Standing out like a vivid light athwart the dull gloom and sameness of my uninteresting and hopeless boyhood—I still see its reflection—intense and concentrated as my nature, one feeling rose dominant to all others, and seemed the only emotion of which at that time I was capable—a feeling of passionate hatred towards—you will be surprised to hear it, for you thought I loved him—towards that child.

“ I was a quiet, reserved, obstinate boy, unamiable and little beloved ; and he was outspoken, frank and free ; in all respects my opposite. Many a time, when I had been punished (and I was punished often, and often unjustly, for I was too proud to clear myself, even when I could), my disciplinarians would say : ‘ Shame on you ! Look at little Edwin ! Take pattern by little Edwin—so much younger, so much more amiable and tractable ! ’ Many a time (we were brought up together, as you know, for I was still earlier left an orphan than he) when we had been engaged in some boyish mischief, in which, although six years younger, he was always the ringleader—I only took part in it in hopes of bringing him into trouble—I was invariably the one to suffer for it. He would wheedle, and coax, and sob, and pray to be forgiven, and promise never to do so any more—a promise made to be broken. Then he would be kissed, and loved, and petted, the while the chorus would arise and swell again—‘ What a difference there is between the two ! What a loving heart this child has, and what a hard one the other ! ’ No torture would have induced me to sue for forgive-

ness, and they knew it. And when my nephew, witnessing my punishment, and knowing well how to curry favour, would cry out, weeping—he always pretended to be generous—that it was he who was the most to blame, and that they must whip him, and not me—louder and more vehemently than ever he would be praised and caressed. ‘Bless the little darling! Learn to imitate him, bad, hard-hearted boy—him, so much younger and so much better!’ So they sowed diligently the seeds of hatred in my heart, and wondered, miserable fools! to see them spring up and grow.”

“But this feeling towards an innocent child is dreadful!” exclaimed the Minor Canon, as the prisoner paused with glowing eyes, out of which the old hatred gleamed so fiercely still, that it was evident that neither death nor the grave between them had been able to quench it; “this is dreadful, Jasper; base and wicked!”

“*This* is nothing,” said the prisoner, mockingly. “Strengthen your nerves, revd. sir, which seem remarkably weak, with a glass of wine before I proceed. There is a bottle of wine and a glass upon the table there. I am coming now to the full-grown hatred of the man, to which the boyish feeling will bear no comparison. The plant was a tender plant as yet, might have been torn up by the roots still; but it had been planted in fruitful ground, and, carefully nourished and nurtured as it was on every side, it grew and flourished mightily.

“Strange enough, though I hated the boy, ever more and more—for all things favoured him—he loved me, or rather, pretended to love me. ‘Let Jack have some of it,’ was his cry from infancy. It was a cunning device to win praise and love from others, but I saw through it plainly, and it never won me. Yet, as time wore on, and I grew older, came greater depth of reflection, more subtlety of thought, and I began to see, that to exhibit this feeling of hatred to the

world was to put it out of my power to do him any real harm. I had only been as a dark background, and shown up more clearly, by comparison, his beauty and his light. In appearing openly as his enemy, I should only succeed in having him taken from me and well protected on every hand. In order to injure him, I must pretend to be his friend ; for only thus could I gain the opportunity and power to stab him in the dark.

“ Pretence was not so easy to me as it was to him, for I possessed a sullen and obdurate nature, which would rather break than bend ; but I had sense enough to perceive clearly that I must abandon my former habit of continually wounding him slightly now, in order to wound him to death hereafter. And, conquering the difficulties, which my own disposition raised up to baffle me, I did so with a steadiness of purpose, and relentlessness of determination, rarely to be found in a boy, and in which I glory still.”

That he did, was evident from the look of triumph in his face ; apparent even in the gloom of the prison. With raised head, smiling lips, and dilated nostrils, he continued.

“ I played my cards well, and won, as every man can win, if he has strength of mind to will with purpose. First, they said, I was improving, then, improved. Instead of a perpetual warning to Edwin, I became, in one respect, a sort of model, in my turn. Jack was a living example of the benefits arising from a strict and rigorous discipline. The correcting rod had not been spared in the case of Jack (Heaven knows it had not !) and the child was saved. Jack was not quite the reprobate and fool he had been believed to be. He had one talent, at least, that he had not buried in a napkin. The petted, indulged, charming boy had to play second fiddle to Jack in one respect. Jack could sing, and Jack could play, and did play, on the old piano of his dead sister, Edwin’s mother, always better and better.

The son and heir felt no jealousy, of course, not even now. The same tune that he had sung as a baby, he sung again. This is how the melody ran: 'Let Jack learn, papa.' Bah, I sicken at the sound of it! But I kept my own counsel. I took the crusts, as I had taken the kicks, in deferential silence, and licked the hands of my benefactors.

"So they let Jack learn, and why? Surely the answer is plain, and easy to be understood. Jack had been eating the bread of idleness long enough, and must learn to earn it. Jack must not be a burden upon Edwin. Jack might make a very good music-master, and give capital interest for the money invested in him. Thus this poor Jack, in whom burned the light of genius, was to be shackled and hindered from spreading his wings for flight. If Jack needed nourishment, let him devour his own heart, and relish the diet, if he could."

"Oh, Jasper, Jasper; how wickedly you pervert and distort the facts you relate! I knew your brother-in-law, and respected him, and am sure that he meant you only kindness. I knew your murdered nephew, whom you so cruelly and foully wrong, and am sure that he truly loved you."

For a moment, the prisoner eyed the Minor Canon with an evil and lowering eye, then sneered contemptuously. "Why should I argue with you? Why be angry with one born blind, because he cannot see? Our allotted time is not endless, and I have much more to tell you.

"About this period, I think Edwin must have been about nine years of age, and I, fifteen, something occurred which made me forget my hate—forget everything but the one thing. You remember the death of her—her mother. Mr. Bud, an intimate friend of my brother-in-law's, had lost his beautiful young wife by drowning, and my brother-in-law frequently went to comfort him in his bereavement. After a time he began

to return these visits (I remember him as a young man, bowed down with the intensity of his grief; he followed her, a year later), bringing his little girl, from whom he was inseparable, with him.

“At the sight of this child, at the very first sight, I do believe, I learned that my heart was capable of another feeling, a passion, stronger and more powerful than even hate; for the hatred, which had before absorbed my every faculty, finding itself, for the first time, unheeded and unfed, shrank away abashed, leaving my heart free for its great adversary which, entering in triumph, began to reign there in its stead.

“I do not know what love means in the mouth of another man, for I have little experience of my fellow creatures. I do not know that I can explain even what it means in mine. I only know that, for the first time, I realized that I was a creature born for all eternity, because this new feeling, new to me and yet as old as God, must live for ever.

“I do not mean to say that this emotion sprang at its birth into full maturity. That would be unnatural and absurd, and no one would believe that a little girl, a child, could awaken such a feeling, but it drew its first breath of life at sight of her, and in course of time has grown to what it is. And in my heart, filled to the brim with this strange, ineffable delight, there was no longer room for hate—it either withdrew altogether to make way for the new occupant, or, dissolving in its presence, melted into love.”

Tears sprang to the Minor Canon's eyes, tears of hot sympathy. Forgetting how stained was the hand of the speaker, he stretched out his own to grasp it. He was coldly and contemptuously repulsed, and in an unmoved and unfaltering voice, the prisoner continued—

“I was happy then. For the first time in my life I understood that happiness was not an idle word, a pretty fable, but a wonderful reality. I had found an object in life; something to live for; something to

attain ; and I worked hard, and worked earnestly to attain it. They praised me all, my masters and my rulers, and acknowledged that I did them credit ; but my highest reward was to see my child goddess standing still to listen when I sang, with bright eyes wide with wonder, and to know that I—that I, had power to entrance her. Oh, for one short space of time I was truly happy ! ”

His voice grew dreamy and he closed his eyes for a moment, as if he would recall the old time when he had felt this bliss and was innocent. When he opened them again, the Minor Canon fancied that they glistened through unshed tears, and his voice trembled as he went on hurriedly, as if afraid of his resolution faltering.

“ I can see her now, as she was then—so plainly, that she might be standing by me in the prison. Not one of your pink and white bits of goodness. A resolute child ; quick to anger, and quick to penitence. A child far oftener naughty than good ; far oftener wilful than obedient. Restless and impatient of control, she would have galled herself against the curb, but answered to the slightest touch of the reins in the hands of love. I used to laugh inwardly over the wisdom of my own masters and rulers who, wagging together their solemn heads in counsel, would resolve that the same strict and rigorous discipline, which had made of the reprobate Jack such a bright and shining light, ought to be applied to the baby rebel, who so saucily defied them. Idiots ! they might have disciplined her to death, but would never have broken her in. Fortunately for her, her destiny, kinder than mine, did not deliver her into their hands.

“ I can see her now, with her small face, so changeful in expression, so wondrously beautiful, that it seemed to me as if every change increased its magical charm ; now flushed with hot anger ; now paling, as her tender heart told her that she had grieved her dearly loved and sorrowful papa ; now frowning over some trifle

not to her liking ; now dimpled with laughter, and mischief ; now bathed in tears. Every time more beautiful than it had been before. Always, from the very first, my ideal of beauty, my only one, from the first and to the last.

“ I could have laboured a life-time for her possession, content with the certainty of my reward at its end. I would have granted my nephew anything, everything else that fate could give him. Riches, goodwill, love, happiness. Let him keep his flocks and herds ! I only asked to be allowed to earn my one little ewe-lamb.”

He stopped, for thick drops of sweat stood on his pale forehead, even in the chilly atmosphere, and the foam gathered round his lips. Fierce and furious boiled within him the fury and passion he had been compelled to subdue so long, and some minutes passed before he could proceed.

“ Although I always felt sure that she would be mine, yet sometimes the old jealousy and hate towards my nephew struggled to regain possession of my heart. When I sang, she would listen speechless with delight, at a distance ; but when I ended, she was gone. She never fondled or caressed me, as she did almost every one else ; but she never teased me, either. She would play with Edwin, and quarrel with him often. I have seen her (watching them both hungrily from a spot where they could not see me) slap him smartly with her tiny hand ; scold him vigorously with her baby voice ; but I have seen her kiss him, too. I can feel the pang now as I felt it each time then, when I saw her raise her rosy lips, although his touched them so carelessly.

“ Not that I wanted to kiss her myself—not yet ; but I could not bear others to do so, and particularly, I could not bear it from him. I meant to kiss her in the time to come ; I, as man, she, as woman ; and to have done so now would have been, to my mind, like foolishly quaffing the juice of the grape before it had undergone that wonderful transformation into wine—

like plucking the bud before it had ripened into the flower.

“ You remember, sir, as I said before, that Mr. Bud died of grief a year after his wife, and that the child was left an orphan. She was put to school, as you know, and for many a long year I saw her no more. Edwin and Edwin’s father went to visit her sometimes, but I never accompanied them. There was a kind of under talk even then that the little folk were intended for a pair, but I neither listened to it, nor heeded it. I made so sure, you see, that she must and would be mine—so sure, that at the end of the long years of hard and earnest work to win means and a position to lay at her feet, I had only to go and claim her.

“ My diligence and untiring industry were rewarded at last by an appointment which would enable me to earn my bread, if not brilliantly, at any rate, creditably and decently. I was elected choir-master of the Cathedral in Cloisterham, and, in addition to this, there was a large connection in the matter of private pupils. I was a clever and careful master, and so discreet and sedate with the young ladies, that my praises were on every tongue. I doubled the connection, and if I could have doubled myself, should still have had enough to do. I was no bad looking fellow, either. Straight and well-built, dark-haired, dark-eyed, with even, regular features, and teeth white and polished as ivory, I was looked upon with no unfavourable eye by many of my older female pupils, and pretty plainly given to understand sometimes that, if I chose to make love to them, I might do so with impunity ; but they were one and all powerless either to please my fancy, or to touch my heart. I cannot even remember how they looked, or which among them was dark, or which was fair. To me they were only dull blocks of humanity, into whom I had to instil, if possible, with infinite labour and endless drudgery, some idea of melody, some notion of tune, and I doubt if even one of their own sex

would have been so totally indifferent to their charms as I was. I never felt that they were flesh and blood : there existed for me but one woman in the world.

“ Shortly after my installation in Cloisterham, Edwin’s father died. I was considered now in the light of a rising man ; I was esteemed and respected. I lived a sober, serious life, free from vice and dissoluteness, and not even the most evil-conditioned tongue ventured to wag to my discredit. My brother-in-law, apparently fully satisfied as to my intrinsic merits, had appointed me in his will guardian to his only child—had commended him to my love, and, in addition to this, had left me a small sum of money as executor, and his blessing. His blessing, you understand, after having delivered me over in my childhood and boyhood to the tender mercies of those masters and rulers of mine. Well, I knew how to be grateful.

“ I had played my part so well, that every one felt it to be the most natural and satisfactory thing in the world that I should have been chosen for this post. I had played it so well, that the whole town, and you also, thought I had abandoned my own claims on youth and happiness, and only lived for him. So I did. So I did !

“ It was then I became aware, for the first time with certainty, that there had been truth in those whispered reports, that my nephew was intended for the girl I loved. There had been a sort of betrothal between them, even during the lifetime of Mr. Drood, in accordance with his earnest wish, and in consequence of the plans which both parents had fondly cherished before Mr. Bud died.

“ The children, knowing nothing of what love meant, yet tickled and elated at the prospect, charming to their inexperience, had consented willingly—she as well as he. I shall never forget the insolent arrogance with which he boasted about this betrothal, and of his power over her. I shall never forget the way in which he

would talk of restraining her here, and hampering her there—showing in every word and look how much he felt himself the lord and master. I shall never forget how he traduced her lovely face, openly exposing to the rude gaze of others, in a portrait, an expression which his own treatment roused there; a hint—he called it—a hint to model herself after his liking. What a difference between us! *I* did not wish to be her master, only her humblest slave.

“The knowledge that I should have to struggle with him for her possession neither surprised nor discomposed me much. It was a natural sequence to our lives as yet, in which he had had all the good things, and I all the evil ones. And perhaps there would be no need of struggling. He had no character at all; was as easy to move as a bit of straw, carried in a different direction with every puff of wind—but she had plenty. The time would come when the breath of love would be breathed into her slumbering heart, and it would awake out of its torpor; she would know then that she could never love him; would feel the fetters, would throw them off (*I* knew how the least control irritated her of old), and would be free again. The time would come, and I could bide it.

“In the meantime she had become my pupil, and in the first joy of these weekly meetings, I forgot all else. To sit by her side, close, close to her, to feel the fragrance of her breath, to even touch her sometimes, were delights so great, so inexpressible, that I wonder I did not die for very rapture. Every nerve, aroused to a thousand times its normal sensitiveness, quivered and tingled for joy in her presence with an intensity which bordered on—nay, was—absolute pain.

“Nevertheless, as the time went on, I began to feel some anxiety and some uneasiness. For her heart, even in the atmosphere of my passionate love, gave no sign of life. If it had been roused, of which I was not sure, it feigned still to sleep. Only one thing gave

me comfort—she had begun to feel the shackles in which she was bound, and to chafe against them. The discontented expression which my nephew had represented, with such coarse truthfulness in his portrait of her lovely face, deepened sometimes into actual unhappiness. I have seen her look at me with fear and dread, and I knew she quarrelled incessantly with her betrothed : he would return to me after an interview with her, to complain of her treatment of him, and with his vanity and self-conceit—the only qualities he possessed—sharply wounded. However much he still boasted of mastering her, when she was his wife, it was plain to see that she lorded it over him finely now. But for all this—and it was that which caused me unspeakable concern—they always made it up again, with tears and kisses.

“ Then I began to feel that this betrothal, which I had almost viewed in the light of a safeguard, preventing others from aspiring to her charms, grew into a real and imminent danger. The time appointed for their union was no longer in the far distance, but close at hand, and her heart slept, to all appearance, still. I knew it would—must, wake up some time or other ; but what could it avail me—what avail her ? if it woke up too late ? And to have known her in the possession of another, even for a single hour, would have driven me mad.

“ I had always hated him : for the old boyish hatred, driven away for a time by the new emotion, had soon proved itself only stunned and not dead, and resumed dominion of me. Besides, his lips had ventured to steal kisses from the sweet lips of my love, and that was an offence in my eyes never to be blotted out. I had resolved, long before, smarting with indignation at witnessing the robbery, that he should pay a heavy heavy price for those kisses, when my time came.

“ But hatred is not murder—only the road to it ; and whoever traverses that road, may know what he

will come to at the end. Therefore I, who had been walking on it so long, saw the last stage of the journey close before me, and saw it, hardly appalled, and no whit amazed.

"Clear him out of the way? It was only the question: either he or I, and self-preservation is the first law of Nature. Clear away the obstacles which hemmed the current of my life? Yes, I would. But how?"

"I felt no remorse, and certainly no tenderness towards him, and yet some feeling or wish to give him one more chance, made me warn him of the danger he was incurring. I did warn him once or twice, but he was too entirely the fool to comprehend me. I could not help that, and when you condemn me, as men of your sort are sure to condemn, remember that I warned him."

The Minor Canon had covered his face with his hand, as if he could not bear to look at the man before him. He tried to speak, in answer to this direct appeal, but the words died away upon his agitated lips, and the effort almost choked him. He could only bow his head in response.

"There have been times, I tell you," continued the prisoner, "when I have undergone absolute agony, not because my soul revolted against the idea of murdering him, but because I could hardly await in patience the fitting hour to do it.

"There have been times, when, as he sat before me, puffed up with pride and miserable self-conceit; gloating over, and boasting of his good luck and fortune, which he had never raised a lazy hand to earn, and yet accepted as his unquestionable due—when I have been hardly able to resist the strong impulse to blot out all youth and beauty from his insolent face, with my heavy fist upon it, and trample him to death then and there.

"I laid my plans wilily. The first necessity was to avert all suspicion from myself, and throw it upon

another. This was difficult, because the boy—curse him!—had no enemies besides me. This caused me so much anxious consideration and thought that I was obliged to resort to artificial means (I took to smoking opium) to gain rest and ease.

“ But fortune favoured me, or rather, the devil, who always can find his followers materials for carrying out any such a purpose, and I soon alighted upon a tool, which would suit me to perfection. I allude, sir, to your dark-haired, dark-skinned, hot-blooded young Indian.

“ The first time I met him at your house, I had my eye upon him. He was a young man, and a handsome ; and every human being of the male sex, possessing these advantages, and brought into contact with my love, was an object of suspicion to me. I soon observed that he was struck and fascinated by her beauty ; and that was enough to make me hate him. I soon observed that he was not favourably disposed towards my nephew, for the same reason that I was not ; and then I knew that I had found my tool, and that it only wanted sharpening. That evening I resolved to lose no time in sharpening it.

“ The young men accompanied the ladies to ‘ The Nuns’ House ’ that evening, as you have reason to remember, Mr. Crisparkle, and I slunk, unobserved, behind them. They came back alone, together, all unconscious of my proximity ; and very soon, to my great satisfaction, I heard them begin to quarrel, as I had foreseen they would.

“ I had let them come to hot and angry words before I interposed, and then, coming up behind them, as if by purest accident, I discreetly dropped some oil into the smouldering fire, until it blazed up again fierce and high.

“ Pretending to be shocked, I endeavoured to restore peace between them—apparently successfully—and then I invited them to enter my lodging and drink together a friendly glass of wine as a sign of complete

reconciliation. They could not well decline to do so, and they came.

“I drugged the wine, and by a little skilful manœuvring soon had them by the ears again. My work was ridiculously easy. If I had chosen, Mr. Crisparkle, I might have had murder in my house that evening, for it was all I could do to separate them. But the time for carrying out my scheme was not fully ripe, and besides, there must be no chance of his escaping, anyway. No possibility of his being only half killed and recovering. I must make quite sure of that.

“The next day I had enough to do in spreading the news, and in making sure—without myself being a too active propagator—that the whole town should hear, and what was more, digest it.

“I foresaw that you, sir, would keep your own counsel, and that shame would tie the young men’s tongues.

“I succeeded again beyond expectation. The whole town learned that young Mr. Landless had made a murderous attack upon my nephew; and also, what was of far more importance, *why* he had done so. Even the noddle-headed inhabitants of Cloisterham understood that, although every means would be taken to keep the young men apart, and to avoid a collision between them, the cause of enmity still existed, and that any moment might bring a second explosion.”

“He told me there was something amiss with the wine,” murmured the horror-struck clergyman, “and I did not believe him. Poor, poor Neville!”

“Aye, poor, poor Neville,” repeated the prisoner, bitterly, “and never, poor Jasper. And yet I had been suffering worse torments than any Tantalus, ever since my childhood. What were his sufferings compared to mine? A mere drop in the ocean—a mere nothing.”

There was silence in the cell for a few moments after this. The Minor Canon was too appalled to speak, even if any words could have been of avail with this

man ; while the prisoner tried to subdue his rising anger. Then John Jasper's voice rose again.

" My tool finely sharpened, and ready to my hand, I had only to consider further in reference to *it*—when and where ? These questions were so trivial and so easy to be solved, that I put them aside for a time and devoted the whole of my attention to the last point, and the most important one. What was to be done with the body ?

" I had read so often, and heard so often, how very, very frequently the discovery of the real murderer followed the discovery of the corpse, that I felt I must give most close and earnest attention to this particular. A few hairs, a scrap of clothing, a footmark, a trifle forgotten in the agitation of the moment, a speck of blood—had one and all been proved sufficient to turn attention towards the real murderer, even though he had laid traps and pitfalls for another with a wary hand ; and had, on thousands of occasions, led to his ruin.

" To prevent this in my case—to prevent the possibility of this, the body must be buried, or destroyed so effectually as to spoil its chance of ever, pieced or whole, bones or flesh, reappearing before the eyes of men. The river might cast it upon its banks, the ocean upon its shore, dogs might scent it in its newly-dug grave, fire prove incapable to destroy it. Again, absorbing my every faculty by night and by day, came the perplexing query : How ?

" I racked my weary brain to find an answer, but for a long time without success. Many ideas occurred to me, but only, after careful test, to be rejected as impracticable. I had smoked opium moderately before ; I took to smoking it immoderately now, in order to irritate my brain into compliance with the demand upon it ; sometimes so immoderately that it refused to work altogether for a time, and I sank into lethargy.

" I thought about it during my daily drudgery ; in the company of my nephew ; even by *her* side. I

thought about it in the Cathedral, chanting or singing, and when my voice resounded through the ancient pile, moving others to tears, and to increased earnestness in their devotions, I knew what it was asking, ever and always—How shall I do it? how shall I do it?

“At last the answer came to me suddenly, with the recollection of an interview I had had some time before with a man, the most unlikely in the world to be the suggestor of an idea. And yet, in a manner, he had been, though unconsciously.

“I had for some time past, in pursuance of my one plan, endeavoured to ingratiate myself with the more influential inhabitants of the town—and so had brought myself into contact with one who, by reason of his innate stupidity, I suppose (for I know no other), had attained a high—and was destined to attain a still higher—position in the place. The immediate result was a dreary supper, and a still drearier conversation (I yawn still at the remembrance), and yet, going back to it in thought at this later period, out of the words of that unmitigated jackass, I drew my clue.

“To bury him—in no pauper’s grave, or out in field or wood, where the faintest sign might be sufficient to arrest attention, or where a stray dog might scent the newly-slain. To bury him—in a grave dug for another, in a coffin put together with no reference to him, in consecrated ground, and under a stately monument, befitting his position as his father’s son and my near relation. To know him there, cleared out of the way for ever, and—under no necessity to shun the spot, for who could ever guess what it concealed?—to revel in this knowledge every time I passed his resting-place. What a continuous source of nourishment for my long-famished heart! What an original—what a grand idea! Do you begin to see light, Mr. Crisparkle? Do you comprehend why I called my story, ‘The Secret of the Grave’?”

The Minor Canon made no answer—how could he ? But he leaned forward breathlessly to hear the rest.

“ I laughed out loud as it occurred to me—for the first time for months ; for years, I think—laughed out loud and free. My nephew was with me at the time, and I remember he turned round to look at me with eyes full of wonder.

“ ‘ Jack, dear old boy, how merry you are to night, ’ ” he said.

“ At that I laughed again, more loudly than ever, and he joined in heartily. Like all empty-headed people of his age, he could giggle at anything and nothing. What a mercy that the thoughts of the heart are not readable upon the face ! If he could have divined the cause of my mirth !

“ On that same opportunity, I had made another acquaintance : and going home, weary to death, on the road between Mr. Sapsea’s residence and my lodgings in the Gate House, I stumbled again upon this man. It was the stonemason Durdles, in whom I felt an uncomfortable interest—uncomfortable, because I had heard that he possessed a strange and almost supernatural gift of discovering, with pretty certain accuracy, where the dead were buried. This gift of his might be very awkward to me, and I felt it necessary to sound him.

“ He was just that degree drunk that the task I had set myself was lightened. I took him in tow, therefore, first getting rid of a remarkably vicious small boy, his companion ; and so shallow was he and his wisdom, that I soon got to the bottom of him.

“ I found that his method of knowing where a dead body lay was regulated by a certain calculation ; that his ear, from long practice, had attained a really remarkable fineness in assisting him ; and that his discoveries were by no means only the result of some fortunate guess, or purest chance, as I had been inclined to consider them. Having satisfied myself as to this,

and still further gained that knowledge that he would always be at my disposal if previously given a stiff glass of grog, I left him. Only as a possible danger regarding the discovery of the body, was Durdles capable of interesting me at that period.

“But now, with this new plan in my head, he became a matter of deep and absorbing interest. The more I thought about it, the better it pleased me, and I grew every minute more sanguine as to its success. Carefully carried out ; every detail considered beforehand ; every possible emergency provided for ; every danger avoided ; it must succeed. And then, freed of my deadliest enemy and hated rival, I would begin a new life with Rosa. For that I should win her in the end, I never doubted. This great passion was not given me for nothing. I should win her, for I would.

“The first thing was to get the co-operation of Durdles—not his spiritual co-operation, of course, but his bodily. The next, was to fix the hour and the day. You yourself, Mr. Crisparkle, were the one to bring that to a point. I daresay you remember calling upon me one evening to beg me to exert my influence with Edwin, and induce him to hold out a hand of reconciliation to your young Indian, do you not ? ”

As the prisoner looked at him for an answer, the Minor Canon made a gesture of assent. If anything could have made this horrible confession more horrible, it would have been the composure, swelling sometimes into triumphant exultation, with which it was narrated.

An occasional burst of anger flashed out once or twice, and threatened to disturb its even current, but only for a moment. Looking back upon his past life from the verge of the grave, John Jasper appeared to see it with a startling clearness, just as a drowning man is said to do.

No one could doubt, hearing him, that this love and this hate had been the ruling motives of his life, and that without them he must die. No one could doubt,

hearing him, the accuracy of the facts and feelings he narrated, nor that this story was not only a part of, but his whole life.

"You did not notice perhaps," he continued, "that your proposal quite confounded me. It was no part of my plan to quench the animosity between these two, or to allow them to be reconciled. And yet to refuse would have aroused wonder and, very probably, suspicion. I rapidly reviewed all the details of my plan, and came to the conclusion that I should incur the smaller danger by complying with your request. I did so, therefore, with an appearance of great cordiality. Then it was that the sands in my nephew's life-glass ran low indeed, and that the few remaining hours he had to live were easy to be counted.

"I immediately put myself into communication with Durdles, and obtained as much of his goodwill as he had to spare (little enough, for his stock-in-hand was as small as my own), by frequently and liberally finding him drink.

"I then proposed to accompany him in his nightly rounds, and view the inside of the old Cathedral, so wearily familiar to me by day, in the new light of night. A bottle in perspective, and Durdles would have been willing to be accompanied by the devil himself. Surprise was totally foreign to the sot's nature, and I took care to guard against it in the minds of others, by carelessly referring to this proposed expedition in their presence. So the night came, and the bottle—and Durdles was ready.

"The particulars of our ramble through the old building, up in the tower and down in the vaults, would prove as uninteresting to you as they were to me, and are foreign to the purpose here. The contents of the bottle, judiciously drugged, Durdles had inside him, and we had hardly regained the crypt, before emerging, when I saw that my object was attained. Durdles sank down unconscious.

"I had the keys, which he carried, in my possession in a moment—the key which would open the door of the crypt, and another key—that belonging to the monument of the late Mrs. Sapsea."

The Minor Canon uttered a sharp exclamation of amaze; raising his hand, and regarding the prisoner with a wild look of terror.

"Ah, you begin to understand," said John Jasper, smiling (what a smile!). "That last was the key which I had been struggling to obtain, and which I knew he had not yet delivered up to Mr. Sapsea, but frequently carried about with him. Without that key, my whole plan would have been frustrated, and I should have had to begin over again. Fortunately, this was not necessary. I had had it in my hand once before, and I knew it for certain the moment that I touched it.

"Durdles slept where he had fallen, heavily. He was safe to sleep for a good hour or two, and in the meantime I had work to do, and not an instant's time to lose in doing it.

"I crept out of the crypt and looked carefully around me. The moon shone bright and clear, and I could see distinctly all over the Close and the immediate neighbourhood. No human being was to be seen or heard. I made quite certain of that before I emerged into the moonlight. The time was about midnight.

"I hurried, quick as thought, towards the churchyard. There, cunningly concealed in the immediate neighbourhood of Mrs. Sapsea's monument, lay certain things which I had placed there beforehand—a sack, a lantern, various tools. Equipped with these, I turned towards the monument, and drawing out the rusty key placed it in the lock.

"It was so little used that all my strength was not sufficient to turn it, but even for this emergency I was provided. I had brought a little bottle of oil with me, and after carefully lubricating the key and the lock, I could open the door and enter.

“ For a few moments I paused upon the threshold of this house appointed for the dead, and let in a little fresh air before descending. Then I summoned up all my resolution, lit my lantern, opened a trap-door at my feet, and going down a few steps, found myself in the vault.

“ To deny that my heart beat faster than usual, or that my pulse throbbed feverishly, would be to lie, Mr. Crisparkle, and my story is, from first to last, true, every word of it. I was but a man after all, and although my nerves were steeled to do the work I had appointed myself, I felt to the full how horrible it was ; and I sickened at first in the chilly and loathsome air, while the cold sweat of an unutterable loathing and terror rose to my brow. But I never thought of going back and abandoning my project ; no, not once.

“ I took a deep draught of a cordial which I had brought with me, and it so far revived me that I was able to look about, and carefully review the place before commencing my work. The vault was about eight feet square, well built and tolerably dry. Mr. Sapsea had spared no expense, as I knew. Then my eye fell upon a solitary coffin—the only coffin in the vault—wherein lay the remains of his wife.

“ It was a very handsome coffin, elegantly decorated and of massive oak. On the lid was a silver plate, on which I read by the light of my lantern, ‘ Ethelinda Sapsea, aged forty-three.’ It stood upon a sort of trestle of stone.

“ Towards this coffin my principal attention was directed, because it was what I wanted—wanted for a new occupant, for whose accommodation, I must dislodge the old one. I immediately began therefore, without waste of time, and without further thought or reflection, which I dreaded, to loosen the screws, which held down the lid.

“ I was unskilful and awkward at this unaccustomed work, and it progressed slowly. I was obliged, too,

to have frequent recourse to my cordial, for I more than once turned sick and faint. But at last all the screws were drawn out, and I could remove the lid.

“I did so without one moment’s pause for thought. I dared not think, you see. With trembling haste I tore off the lid and looked down upon the corpse. I had prepared myself for the rising of a foul and loathsome odour, but to my surprise, the air, already impure and mouldy, did not grow much worse. I believe the corpse must have been embalmed in some way against decay. I had prepared myself for that, I say, and had bound a loose handkerchief before my mouth and nose, but I was not prepared for what I saw, or fancied.

“I saw the dead eyes, sunken in the dead face, open and look at me. I saw the dead mouth utter words. There was no sound in the vault except the ticking of the watch in my pocket, and the wild beating of my heart, which bounded fiercely at first, and then stood still to listen.

“Without sound, and yet as plainly audible as if they had been words of thunder—not heard, but felt—the long-dead and long-buried Mrs. Sapsea made me understand these words: ‘Thou hast planned well, mortal, to hide thy secret from all living eyes, but hadst forgotten these dead ones of mine which, though dead, can see thee. Know, that when the witnesses rise up against thee, I shall be among them.’ Then the eyes closed again, the mouth stood still, and only a dead face, shrivelled and shrunken, dried up and withered, lay motionless before me. And my paralysed heart began to beat again.

“With the exertion of all my strength, bodily and mental, I gathered up the dead body, and thrust it into the sack, brought for that purpose, laid the lid carefully upon the coffin, put my tools into my pocket, and, with my lantern in my hand, and the sack upon my back, staggered up the steps again, and once more into the moonlight. The churchyard and the Close

were deserted; it was hardly likely that any one would choose that time of night to wander *there*, of all places in the world. Then I hastened with my burden to the lime-pit in the neighbourhood, and cast it in. And then I hid my lantern and my tools again, took off in wax an impress of the key to Mrs. Sapsea's monument, and hastened back to Durdles. I knew that the quick-lime in the pit would be true to its name and do its work of destruction speedily and well. And if at any time any remnant of Mrs. Sapsea's bones should be discovered, they would be female ones and could not be supposed to have any connection with the murder of Edwin Drood; while the presence of a dead body in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin would be perfectly natural, and only its absence could excite surprise. Not even Durdles with all his knockings and his rappings could discover that it was the wrong one. Therefore my nephew, once laid in that abode, would remain there undisturbed until he, and I also, had long been dust and ashes. And the discovery of his dead body, unless I chose to reveal it, was an impossibility. The worst part of my work was accomplished, and well accomplished.

"It was high time that I arrived in the crypt. Durdles was beginning to move, and to utter unmeaning words. I laid the keys by his side, as if he had dropped them there, and began to pace up and down to warm myself, for my teeth were chattering. It was close upon two o'clock in the morning. I had been absent nearly two hours.

"Durdles came back to consciousness peevish and discontented. I got rid of him as speedily as possible, and regaining possession of my lantern and my tools, which I should want once more, went home to rest after my labours. I had been greatly alarmed at first on coming out of the Cathedral to find that same hideous urchin in waiting for Durdles, but I discovered that he had only just arrived, and could not possibly

have seen me, and so went back to the Gate House reassured.

“I could laugh now—so thankful was I to have the night behind me—at the remembrance of that foolish and unmeaning vision in the vault. If I were safe from living eyes, I had no occasion to fear dead ones. But I laughed noiselessly, for I was standing by the bedside of my sleeping nephew, and looking down upon him as he slept. That night, or the remainder of that night, I, too, enjoyed sound and refreshing sleep, and when I woke I felt almost like a new-born man for very lightness.

“It was close upon Christmas Eve, and upon the evening of that day my nephew was to die. I had made sure long before, that there was no chance, not the remotest, of the betrothal being dissolved, and I saw them myself renew their vows with a tender kiss, more tenderly, so it seemed to me, than they had ever kissed. My comfort was, that it was for the last time.

“My nephew and young Mr. Landless, as you know, met to dine at my house on Christmas Eve. They met cordially, and each did his utmost to preserve that cordiality until the end. Nothing whatever occurred to disturb the harmony. I played and sang to them, at their request, until at last we all sat silent, and listened to the fierce play of the wind out of doors. The play had risen into fury when Mr. Neville rose to go. There was a wild cry in the air as the angry wind lashed it, and the trees swayed and trembled.

“I proposed that the two young people should go down to the river together, and contemplate the grandeur of the storm. They did so; and during their absence I made my preparations. In a very short time, my nephew returned alone. I was waiting for him in the gateway.

“‘Is that you, Ned?’ I said, as he entered it.

“‘Yes, Jack. Why? What are you doing here in this awful draught?’

“ ‘Waiting for you, dear boy.’

“ ‘Mercy on us, Jack ! You didn’t suppose that the wind would carry me away bodily, did you ? Not but what it tried to do so.’

“ ‘I want to show you something, Ned.’

“ ‘Then let’s go upstairs and see it, Jack, for I’m nearly frozen.’

“ ‘It is in the churchyard.’

“ ‘Then if you please, Jack, I will see it to-morrow, or if it can’t be seen then, will be satisfied to go without seeing it. No sight, however wonderful, could please me better now than a roaring fire.’

“ ‘To please me, Ned ; I promise you that it will surprise you.’

“ ‘What a tiresome old Jack you are ! Well, I suppose I must go with you. But for all you pretend to make so much of me, I know who’s master. You always end, you old tyrant ! in making me do what you wish.’

“ He spoke these last words half pettishly, half playfully, looking, nevertheless, wistfully into my face to see if he had offended me. His face was turned towards the lantern on one side of the archway, so that I could see it plainly. Well for him, or ill for him, that he could not see mine.

“ For my blood was boiling hot and madly within me, suffusing my face with burning colour, and my restless hands were itching to lay him low. This delay, occasioned by his unexpected opposition, irritated me to death.

“ ‘Come,’ I said, hoarsely.

“ ‘Just one moment, Jack. I really must run upstairs and take a drop of that mixture you brewed for us this evening. The wind, roaring so fiercely, has got down into my stomach I do believe, and is playing the very deuce there. Go on before ; I shall overtake you in a minute.’

“ To have lost sight of him, for ever so short a time,

would have been more than I could endure. Grasping him by the shoulder with one hand, I took a small flask of brandy out of my pocket with the other (I always carried it with me on account of a sort of fainting attack, to which I was subject) and gave it to him.

" ' We must make haste,' I said, ' or we shall be too late. Take a drop of this. We shall have seen what I want to show you in another minute, and if you still feel the need of it, I will brew you any amount of the mixture on our return.'

" He put the flask to his lips; then transferred it to his own pocket.

" ' I shall want another sip in the churchyard,' he said, ' since you will take me there.'

" That flask lies buried with him in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin, for I forgot it afterwards.

" I almost dragged him forward. As we passed out from under the gateway, the wind rushed to meet us, frantically strove to separate us, and shrieked—so I fancied—in wild despair at failing. We heard it crash the glass of the lantern behind us, by the light of which I had seen his face for the last time, and it went out—as the light of his life would soon go out, for ever.

" My nephew seemed bewildered by the crash and roar, and clung to me as a terrified child might have done. I fancy he spoke, or tried to speak, but the angry wind seized the words he uttered, or would have uttered, and scattered them far and wide.

" When we got under the shadow of the Cathedral, on that side where the churchyard lay, we were sheltered from the extreme fury of the wind, and could speak and breath again. My time was come.

" ' Go on a step, Ned, and I will show it you.'

" He answered,

" ' All right, Jack, but if it isn't well worth the trouble we have had, see if I don't pay you out, old chap.'

" Those were the last words I heard him speak.

The very last words he ever would speak in his world. The next moment I had flung a noose around his neck, with a skilful and steady hand, and drawn it close and tight. He neither struggled nor cried out, but fell dull and heavy like a stone.

"I never could have thought any one could have been killed so easily. What a miserable thing is the breath of life in our nostrils! Another breath can quench it. I stooped down, and took him in my arms. He was warm, of course, but motionless and dead. I must have broken something in his neck, I suppose, by the suddenness and sharpness of the pull. But he was dead: there was no doubt about that, and I must make haste to bury him. Any moment might bring discovery. I could only breathe freely when I knew him in the coffin I had prepared for him.

"We were close to Mrs. Sapsea's monument. This time I had no difficulty in opening it, and found all as I had left it.

"I laid him in the coffin; first, for a reason I had, taking off his watch and his shirt pin. He fitted it to perfection. I was just about to fasten down the lid, when, for the second time, I had a renewal of that strange vision which had appeared to me before in the vault. I saw in the coffin, not my nephew, whom I had just laid there, but Mrs. Sapsea again. I saw the dead eyes open in the shrunken and shrivelled face, I saw the dead mouth move, as if uttering words. And my heart once more gave one fierce bound, then stood still to listen.

"It stood still so long, that I became unconscious. When I came to myself, I was icy cold, and my hands were so numbed that I had hardly strength to screw down the coffin lid, and make it firm and sure. But at last my task was ended, and I was a free man. I had carefully avoided looking again into the coffin for fear of another repetition of the vision, which I knew would have unmanned me.

"I left the vault, exactly to all outward appearance, as I had first found it. It would probably only be re-entered when, in the course of nature, Mr. Sapsea should be gathered to his fathers. How astonished the pompous idiot would have been could he have imagined who would be his neighbour!

"The wind seemed as desirous to keep me in the vault as I had been to bring my nephew there. I had quite a struggle to get out, but I had conquered and subdued the wind, as man always can the elements, locked the door for the last time, and went back to the Gate House alone.

"I warmed myself inside and out, for I was chilled to the bone, and then, though the storm still raged madly, I went out again, taking the key (a new one, made from the impress in wax) and Edwin's watch and pin with me. I might have left them also in the coffin, which would have been the last place where they would have been sought, but that I wanted them to play another part. I wished the world to make sure that Edwin had been murdered, and also I wished to throw suspicion upon your young Indian. There would be no chance of my nephew's having absconded, if his watch and pin should be found, as I meant them to be; and your young man, who had ventured to cast an eye of love upon my choice, must be rendered powerless ever to win her. I cast, therefore, the key into a deep part of the river, and the watch and pin into a spot where I hoped they might be found. You know the rest, Mr. Crisparkle, and if you wonder, as perhaps you do, how it is that I should remember even the smallest details, even to the conversation with my nephew, so accurately, do as I have done, and you will find that the difficulty—the only difficulty—is to forget."

As he ended thus abruptly, the prisoner turned his back upon the Minor Canon, as if he had done with him and the world from this time forward. All life

and animation died out of his face, his eye lost its fire, and as he crouched down again upon the bed on which he was sitting, he had more the look of a stunned animal than of a human being, so completely and heavily he sank into lethargy.

CHAPTER XVII

A DOUBLE RESURRECTION

MR. CRISPARKLE had been listening to the story of the prisoner, ever since the mention of Mrs. Sapsea's monument, with a feeling of intense and bewildering amaze. He had not interrupted its progress once since that period, but sat with bowed head, hearing every word which John Jasper uttered, and not only mechanically hearing, but understanding it too, yet with an impression, growing as the story proceeded, that it was too wild and improbable to be true, but must be a vision of the narrator. And even in the midst of this, an inward voice seemed to be saying to him, constantly—so constantly, that the repetition grew almost unbearable :

“Edwin Drood's dead body laid in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin. Mrs. Sapsea's coffin opened and found empty. Who can reconcile these two facts, if facts they are ? ” And again : “ Mrs. Sapsea's coffin opened and found empty. Edwin Drood's dead body laid in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin. What is the meaning of all this ? ” And again, ditto, ditto, *ad infinitum*, ending at last with : “ I dare not think any more about this at present, or I shall grow distracted.”

Yet, notwithstanding this firm resolve, he was still thinking about it when the story was concluded (that story which he found so wildly improbable, and yet which he could have repeated again, word for word, as if he had lived, instead of only heard it), and was still thinking about it when the gaoler, pre-announced by the rattling of his tools, turned the key of this

particular cell in the rusty lock, and came to summon him.

"You've been a long while over your time, sir," said the gaoler, "but as I heerd him (with a rattle of his keys towards the bed) a talking constant, and as it was you, sir, I took the liberty of closing a hi, and let the time be hanged."

This last word sounded so unpleasantly suggestive in the prison, that even the gaoler felt it. Following, therefore, the metaphorical closing of the eye with the literal one, he managed with the other organ of vision, and with remarkable ingenuity, to glance respectfully at the Minor Canon, and significantly at the prisoner.

"You'll be glad enough to get out into the fresh hair," he continued, energetically re-opening the closed eye and looking about him as if he feared he had gone too far with his experiment, and that his eyes might have lost the power of ever working together in unison, "the hatmosphere of the cells brings down the prisoners remarkable, and it ain't a bit wonderful that it should affect you, sir. He's quiet now, as quiet as a lamb," bringing again one eye to bear upon John Jasper, who still sat upon the bedstead, as rigid and unlike life, as if he were dead, "but he've got the prison ager for all that; there's a many on em gets it, and he, in partickler, has his hot and cold fits, reglar. He was so obstreperous, that we had to put him in irons, though it ain't customary, unless they're wiolent, afore the trial."

The Minor Canon looked uneasily at the prisoner, and slightly shook his head. Then, staggering, rather than rising, to his feet, he indicated that he was ready.

"Bless you, sir," said the gaoler, with a chuckle (he had caught the deprecatory glance of the clergyman, and fully understood its import), "he ain't a listening to me. He's too far gone for that; he's as good as dead now, and in a few short weeks he'll be as bad as it. Now, sir, if you'll have the goodness."

He followed the gaoler⁷ out through the chilly stone passages, into the fresh air, leaving John Jasper locked up in the solitude of his cell, but closely pursued by the importunate riddle which he had found there, and which would not be left behind ; my first, Edwin Drood's dead body laid in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin ; my second, Mrs. Sapsea's coffin opened and found empty ; my whole, what ? and—"I must put off the solving of this to a moment when my mind is clearer and less agitated, for now it is making me light-headed."

At night, from under his pillow it crept out in the darkness, and took up its station by his ear, repeating : "Mrs. Sapsea's coffin opened and found empty. Edwin Drood's dead body laid in Mrs. Sapsea's coffin. Who can make head or tail of this ? " and : "I must banish it with a strong effort, or it will haunt me all the night."

* * *

Mr. Grewgious, in the kindness of his heart, had made up his mind to call on Mr. Sapsea. He had heard of the popular excitement concerning Mrs. Sapsea's ghost, and the consequent ignominious treatment which the unfortunate widower had received at the hands of his townspeople.

Mr. Sapsea, still confined to bed, graciously expressed his desire that Mr. Grewgious should visit him there ; and the Collector of Rents, conscious what a poor figure he would inevitably make of himself, and ashamed to feel how sorry he was, submissively followed the maid conducting him.

The sight of the tremendous bed and the solemn figure reposing therein, tended still further to confuse and overawe him ; and he arrived at the bedside in such bodily and mental perturbation that he was incapable of uttering a word, and stood, an image of despair and dismay, before the Mayor.

That fallen Power, hollow-eyed and shrunken, pointed, with somewhat of his old stately manner,

to a chair beside his bedstead, and harassed Mr. Grewgious actually found himself seated there at length, before the look had vanished.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," began his Honour.

Mr. Grewgious felt that Society expected him to reply that the pleasure was on his side ; but this would have been such an unmitigated fib that it never got any further than his conscientious throat, where it stuck fast.

"You find me," continued the Mayor, no whit disconcerted, but rather gratified, by the silence and awkwardness of Mr. Grewgious, which he looked upon as an involuntary tribute to the Presence in which he found himself, "you find me abashed and laid low, and my enemies triumphing over me."

"Oh, no !" said Mr. Grewgious, forgetting himself in his sympathy, "don't say that. Things are sure to clear up. I have good reason for saying that I am sure they will."

"Let us not deny the facts," continued Mr. Sapsea, with raised voice and increased solemnity, "let us not be guilty, as men and Englishmen, of turning our backs upon the Truth. If I had compared myself in the times past to a stately tree, spreading out wide branches over the community to protect and shield them from the storm, you might probably have admitted that the comparison was a just one."

Mr. Grewgious, bowing his head low, smoothed it also.

"And shall I shrink now," went on the Mayor, quite in a lively tone and struggling to sit up in bed, "from the acknowledgment that that same mighty tree, the ornament of the forest, has been struck by lightning, while braving the storm for others, and blasted in its pride. No, sir, I scorn to do it. It is a ruin whom you favour with your company. A ru—u—in ! Though, perhaps, you may wish to add, —a majestic one,"

Mr. Grewgious, uttering some inarticulate sounds, might have been understood to imply that he did wish to add it.

It was astonishing to note the change which this uncontradicted self-laudation was producing in his Honour. He had looked old, shrivelled and shrunken, in the depths of his tremendous bed when the Collector of Rents had entered, but he seemed to fill out visibly before his visitor's eyes, like a collapsed air-cushion re-inflated.

"Like all men who, from gifts of Nature or circumstance, tower above the herd," he continued, quite revived—"might I trouble you to raise the pillow at my head?—I have been at the disadvantage of being out of their range of vision, and consequently misunderstood and undervalued. Time, as you justly observe, will open their blinded eyes, and I shall have my niche in the Temple of Fame, but I may not live to see it. And now to turn to a subject which made me specially desirous of conversing with you this afternoon—you know that a terrible crime has been committed?"

"Certainly. You allude to the attempted suicide and murder by the river?"

"I allude to no such thing," said the Mayor, severely. "Since that misguided young man quitted Cloisterham, and wantonly abandoned those opportunities for instruction which he might have profited by (I had admitted him to the favour of my acquaintance, and my evening conversation), I immediately foresaw that he would—to put it familiarly—go to the Bad. He has gone to the Bad, as was to be expected, and has justified my predictions. But he has wholly ceased to interest me; for, the moment he left Cloisterham and his unheard-of privileges, I had done with him."

"But perhaps you do not know," said Mr. Grewgious. "that he is also accused of the murder of his nephew, Edwin Drood, and that there is almost overwhelming evidence against him,"

"I have heard that also," responded the Mayor, "and it does not surprise me in the least. A young man, capable of casting away such inestimable advantages, is capable of anything. For the rest, spare me the details. They do not interest me. They are distasteful to me," said his Honour.

"Then, of what crime are you speaking?"

"Of another, far more terrible. Of the sacrilegious violation of the sanctity of the tomb. Of the desecration of the coffin of my deceased wife."

"What! you know that, too?" cried Mr. Grewgious, in amaze. "And we meant to keep it close for the present, it seems so improbable; and yet the old woman swears it."

The Mayor regarded the speaker with severe displeasure.

"If," he began slowly, "you are speaking in those highly offensive terms of a most excellent and appreciative lady residing opposite, I beg to inform you that I cherish a warm regard for her, and a high opinion of her capacity for looking up, and cannot permit it, in my presence."

"Oh dear!" murmured Mr. Grewgious, who, quite innocent of any intention of offending, was all the more confounded. "I knew I should get into a mess. I ain't fit for society. It's like trying to walk on eggs and not breaking 'em—with my weight too. Bless me! (punishing his head without mercy for its incapacity) how couldn't I see that I was better out of it?"

"That ornament to her sex," continued the Mayor with righteous warmth, "truer to me in misfortune than in prosperity, prepares with her own scholastic hands, little accustomed to such uncongenial work, basins of delicious gruel, cups of the strongest beef tea, jellies and broths of surpassing quality, and requests my acceptance of these refreshments with a deference more refreshing still. Therefore, I repeat, that a lady capable of such acts of spontaneous and

reverential homage, is not a lady to be spoken of as 'an old woman,' and shall not be, in my presence."

The Mayor was now actually sitting up in bed, and, puffed out and pompous, was becoming alarmingly his old self again.

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated the unfortunate and horror-struck Collector of Rents, upon whom a light began to break, "you don't fancy I meant Miss Twinkleton—do you? I should never have dreamed of taking such a liberty. The very mere thought," said Mr. Grewgious, wiping his face and head with a pocket-handkerchief drawn out for that purpose, "makes me break out into a copious perspiration. I was referring to an old woman in London, who don't mind being called so; if she did, I shouldn't do it, I hope."

"Would you be so obliging," said the Mayor, accepting this apology with gracious condescension, "as to hand me my dressing-gown and slippers. There's a fire in my dressing-room, and I feel almost strong enough for an easy-chair."

Mr. Grewgious, anxious to assist, but still confused in his mind, handed the Mayor successively, apparently under the impression that it was what was requested of him, a bootjack, a razor, a pair of trousers and a poker, and finally was obliged to ring the bell and obtain assistance.

When his Honour was comfortably established in his easy-chair, looking (so Mr. Grewgious thought) quite a man and Mayor again, Mr. Sapsea resumed the interrupted conversation.

"We were speaking of the desecration of the tomb of my late wife," he said. "It was opened, at my suggestion, in order to silence the voice of calumny, and then the awful discovery was made that it had been opened before and robbed of its contents."

"Opened? Already?" cried Mr. Grewgious. "How vain is every attempt of the murderer to hide his fatal secret! If the living are silent, the very stones

cry out, and the dead bear witness to the crime. So you have had it done, while we were waiting ! ”

“ I do not understand you, sir,” said the Mayor, with a look which added, “ and when I say I do not understand you, it is equivalent to saying that you are not to be understood.”

But Mr. Grewgious went on hurriedly and eagerly, never heeding his Honour, and apparently forgetting all his fears concerning the demands of society.

“ Thus, even without our efforts at hunting him down, and tracking out the crime so cunningly concealed, it would have come to light. Wonderful as it appears that this should have been hidden from me, yet I can finish your narration, Mr. Sapsea. You found the corpse of your dead wife removed, and another laid in its place.”

The Mayor, alarmed at this sudden outburst on the part of his abashed and silent visitor, regarded him as if he feared he had shared the fate of Durdles, and had gone mad.

“ I repeat, sir, that I do not understand you, and I fear you do not understand yourself. Whether the corpse was removed for anatomical purposes, or by an enemy, jealous of my renown, and seeking thus to throw suspicion on my honour, I cannot say—I have my eye on a villain capable of both these crimes—the fact is, as a very worthy witness has informed me, that the coffin contained no remains whatever of the late Mrs. Sapsea, but was empty.”

“ Empty ? ”

“ Empty.”

Each of the gentlemen looked aghast at the other ; the one aghast at the unexpected news ; the other aghast at a vision conjured up by his fears.

“ It *can't* have been empty,” began Mr Grewgious, after an interval of alarmed silence, during which the Mayor had cautiously laid his hand upon the bell-rope by his side. “ We agreed to keep it secret, till the

time came, I and my helper ; but it *cannot* have been empty. The old woman said so, the old woman swore *he* had said so, in his visions."

" You speak," said the Mayor, tightening his grasp of the bell-rope, " in enigmas."

" What is the meaning of this ? " enquired Mr. Grewgious, of the air, of the fire, of the window, and of a picture hanging over the mantelpiece, successively. As, however, these insensate objects remained speechless, with the exception of the fire, which roared lustily, but incomprehensively, he applied finally to Mr. Sapsea (growing stony) and repeated for the fifth time—" What is the meaning of this ? " He was using the very words unconsciously, which Mr. Crisparkle was uttering almost at the same moment.

" The meaning," answered the Mayor, somewhat peevishly, and doubtful whether it would be wiser to ring or not, " is, that I am still an invalid, and can't stand long visits as yet—and when I say, the coffin was empty, I mean, of course, empty of anything expected to be found there. There was a ring—new to me, and hardly possible to have belonged to Mrs. Sapsea without my knowledge. To have supposed that ring to have been the property of Mrs. Sapsea, would have been to suppose Mrs. Sapsea capable of concealing something from me, and an insult, not only to Mrs. Sapsea, but also to *me*, sir " (irritably, as if Mr. Grewgious persisted in supposing it).

" May I see the ring ? "

" I feel very weak," said the Mayor, with a sudden relapse, " but if you will not be too long about it, you can do so. You will find it in that little drawer—third one from the top—of my secretary."

What made Mr. Grewgious tremble and shake as if a storm wind had seized him ? Why, even when he had found the right drawer, after repeated failures, did he hesitate to open it ? Why, when he did so, did he show symptoms of such violent agitation ? Perhaps

Mr. Sapsea, with alarmed eyes upon him, might have been propounding these questions.

A little leather case, worn and old. A ring—so small that one fell instinctively into a muse, to think how slender must have been the finger that could wear it.

A ring! *Her* ring! Bringing back with a rush old days long past, but cherished still as a blessed memory of my youth. Oh, love, dead so many weary years; leaving behind only the hope of meeting thee in heaven, and daring, unreprieved, to love thee there! Oh little dead hand, now mouldering in the grave, yet once, when wearing this, so soft and fair! Oh, God, ever merciful, who gave me one never-to-be-forgotten glimpse into Thy Paradise, and endless longing to live worthy of such rich reward! With bowed heart and head, I acknowledge the wisdom of Thy decree and know that though Thou tookest my treasure, Thou hast restored and wilt restore it.

A ring! *Her* ring! Given back to life and light, and sparkling in the dancing firelight like an emblem of immortality. Forgive these tears which will not be restrained; they are not tears of rebellion, O Lord! but of humblest submission to Thy decree, and seek to praise and glorify Thy name!

"I can identify this ring," he said slowly, when the first burst of uncontrollable emotion had been suppressed, "but not now; I am too affected—too deeply moved at the sight of it, to be able to collect my thoughts sufficiently even to wonder how the ring was found there, *alone*. Let me lay it for the present back again, where you laid it, till I can." And tremblingly smoothing his smooth head, Mr. Grewgious took leave of the astonished Mayor, quitting the room just as a servant-maid entered it, carrying a tray, on which stood a basin of smoking beef tea, that moment come with Miss Twinkleton's humblest compliments.

Mr. Grewgious never knew how he got back to his

hotel, for his legs carried him thither without any conscious instruction from his mind. He was thinking of years long past, when he, an awkward, shambling lad, had first looked into a sweet face, and felt in doing so, what heaven really was ; he was recalling the time when the hope of attaining such a treasure had dawned upon him like a wonder too great to be possible, yet rapturously cherished while it lasted ; he was enduring again the old agony, when the vain hope died out for ever ; he was plodding again the dreary, dreary path of life without it ; he was thinking how the first dim light which shone upon this dreary life was the wish so to live as to have been worthy of her, if God had willed it so ; he was thanking God that this light had grown and spread, not dazzling as the other, but calm and peaceful as twilight before the night comes, and the re-breaking of the day. And he knew that though the All-good and All-merciful had given man, for his earthly portion, mourning as well as gladness, sorrow as well as joy, yet that all His gifts were *good*.

On arriving at the "Crozier," he enquired, coming back from time past to time present, where Mr. Neville was, and learned from the waiter that he had returned about an hour before, and being weary from his walk, had followed his sister's earnest advice, and gone to lie down.

"But there's another young gent," added the waiter, "a waiting for you in the coffee-room, and is, at this moment, a pacing up and down, and a walking to and fro, like as if tired of it. And if it is your pleasure, sir, will you see the gentleman in your own room, for he wishes to speak to you in private ? "

It was certainly not Mr. Grewgious' pleasure to do so, but he seldom consulted *that* as to his actions, and he answered, wearily—

"I suppose so," adding, "is he a Cloisterham gentleman ? "

"No, sir ; from Lunnen, sir. Come down on business, sir."

"A gentleman with bushy white hair ? "

"No, sir ; a young gent, with blue spectables."

"Oh ! " exclaimed Mr. Grewgious, in a livelier tone, "my clerk from town. I hope there's nothing amiss."

"He hasn't said there is, but he looks like thunder, and have rung at least ten times to ask if you was come ; which ain't the manners of a gentleman," said the waiter, indignant at this presumption on the part of so inferior a human being, "and might a showed me as he was only a clerk or something of that sort."

"Bring him up to my room," said Mr. Grewgious, without further comment, and in a few moments the *new* clerk, still called by that name to avoid confounding him with that lost genius and unity, Mr. Bazzard, stood before him.

"Take a chair, Mr. Brandis," began Mr. Grewgious. "I hope nothing's the matter. Yet stay, you are hungry and tired, no doubt, let me order some refreshment for you first."

But the young man came forward, until close to Mr. Grewgious, putting the strange and alarming enquiry—

"Do you know me, sir ? "

There was something so new in the low and agitated voice—strange, and yet strangely familiar—that the old man, whose nerves were still shaken, turned a shade paler, as he answered, trying to smile as if it were a joke—

"My senses are never very acute, and I have been alarmed and agitated just now, but unless they have quite deserted me, I think I do. Come, Mr. Brandis, if you have anything to communicate, either good or bad, out with it, and let me know the best or worst at once."

"Look once more, sir, I beseech you. Has the sight of me never aroused in you the memory of another ?

Let me take off these disfiguring glasses. Do you know me *now* ? ”

As he raised his uncovered eyes, brimming over with tears, Mr. Grewgious trembled so violently that he was obliged to grasp a chair near him for support ; but when he spoke, his voice was hard and cold, and cuttingly severe.

“ I know *this*, sir, that you have been deceiving me who trusted in you ; and that I am cruelly disappointed in you, therefore. I see, also, that your hair, which was dark as night, has changed its colour, and is brown. You have been disguising yourself for some purpose, and disguise is false, sir. No honourable and honest man need take refuge in a lie.”

“ Oh, for Heaven’s sake,” cried the young man, wildly, making a movement as if he would have flung himself on his knees before his master, which, however, Mr. Grewgious prevented him from doing, “ hear me before you condemn ! Oh, my benefactor ! dear to me as if you were my father ; whom I look up to and reverence next to God ; try once more ! Listen to the sound of my voice, so long purposely changed and altered. Look at my face, marked as if years had passed over it, instead of only months. Fancy me bright and young and happy, as I was before all my happiness and youth were blasted by a fearful crime. Take away in imagination this year’s growth of beard, and imagine the face without it. Oh, Mr. Grewgious, it is true that I have assumed a new face and a new voice to blind you, but with no mean or base motive ! You must, *must* know me, now.”

“ No,” returned the old man, drawing back and holding out both hands as if to repulse him, while every drop of blood vanished out of his shrunken cheeks, “ I do *not* know you. What do you mean by frightening me ? How do you dare to do it ! ”

“ Then,” said the young man, more quietly, but with an accent of such intense sadness, that it struck on

the tender heart of Mr. Grewgious like a sharp knife, "I must be changed far more awfully than even I feared, and might have spared myself the trouble of this unnecessary disguise ; for, sir, though you do not know me, as sure as there is a God above us, I am Edwin Drood ! "

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH MR. CRISPARKLE READS A LONG MANUSCRIPT

A FEW days had elapsed since the unexpected and marvellous disclosure to Mr. Grewgious, and, after the first burst of incredulous surprise and even terror, on his re-appearance, when every one, even the most sanguine, had long abandoned all hope of his possible escape, the *new* Edwin Drood (so different from the old one, that it seemed as natural to prefix this adjective to his name as if he had really been another) was gradually beginning to be believed in.

Yet, but for the evidence of the ring and the evidence of the desecrated tomb of the late Mrs. Sapsea, everybody, not excepting Mr. Grewgious, might have been inclined to regard him as a cunning impostor, who, having in his position as clerk to the Collector of Rents obtained possession of the particulars of this sad family drama, had resolved to make them a means of base profit to himself.

For Mr. Crisparkle, up to the present time, had related no particulars of the murderer's confession, and had resolved not to do so until the disclosure should be sanctioned by the result of the trial.

Mr. Grewgious had refused to hear any detailed account of the escape until Mr. Crisparkle could be present as one of the auditors, declaring that his poor head would not be able to support it alone ; therefore, one evening, a few days later, the Minor Canon and the old man sat down together in the cosy book-room, in Minor Canon Corner, to peruse a manuscript which the former clerk had put into his employer's hand :

begging him to excuse his being present at the interview, for the remembrance of all he had passed through never failed completely to upset him, even now. He had written it out, he added, further, during the last few days in London, because the necessity of keeping silence for his uncle's sake had been changed, by altered circumstances, into a necessity to disclose the real facts of the case, and he had felt he could do it more efficiently in this manner.

He had also implored the old man to refer to past events, in his hearing, as little as possible; although if considered necessary, he could still further prove his identity by minute descriptions of places and persons, impossible for an impostor to know.

Then Mr. Crisparkle, previously narrating to Mr. Grewgious such outline of the prisoner's confession as might be useful in comparing the accuracy of the two narrations, began to read as follows:—

“I need go no further back in this narrative of my wonderful and almost miraculous escape from death and the grave, than to the evening before the day I was missed, to last Christmas Eve.

“Hardly one full year, and yet time enough to have made me such a different being to what I was, that I fancy sometimes I must have dreamed the past, and that I—the I, who write these words—can never really have been the light-hearted, careless, giddy boy whom the world knew as Edwin Drood.

“Will the world believe me, when I tell them that I was he, or will it (terrible fear which appals me, not for myself, for God knows that I suffer as much in resuming the old name as I did in losing it, but because the certainty of my being alive is the only means of saving him, my uncle, from the gallows)—will it reject my claim, and damn me as an impostor?

“Only one short year, and yet it might be ages, so far, far back must I go, when I would return to the thoughtless days of my youth, and the last evening

of my life, as it was. I have read somewhere of a man, a doctor, I believe, who fell asleep only ten minutes, by his watch, and who dreamed in that time that he married; had children; saw them grow up into men and women; became a grandfather; lived a long life, in short, in *ten minutes*. I slept for many weary months, and dreamed enough, I am sure, to have long since attained the allotted age of three-score years and ten.

“What is age, after all? and what do we mean by old and young? Is not suffering, with its attendant experience, age? Is not happiness, fresh and bright, always young? There are worn out mothers of families, only two or three and twenty years of age; there are young men about town who have seen fifty or sixty summers, and are gay boys still.

“I raise my head to look into the glass opposite, and see a face reflected back, familiar to me now, but which, when I looked at it, six months ago, made me turn round suddenly to see what stranger was standing behind me. A face, pale, hollow-eyed, and middle-aged; somewhat lined, as if forty years had passed over it, and left no uncertain marks behind.

“Combed low over the troubled forehead, clusters bright brown hair, lit up with a touch of sunshine (I have washed away the black dye, you understand); this and the fresh growth of beard, which frames the worn face, and covers the upper lip, are the only visible tokens of youth left me, and of brightness. Take away ten years, therefore, in deference to this legacy, and there remain thirty. A man, certainly not much under thirty years, and aged for his time of life. That is the final verdict, after careful scrutiny. No one would doubt it.

“Yet the register of Edwin Drood’s birth is only twenty-one years old, and the clerk who wrote it, and the witnesses thereof, are living still and could prove

its correctness. Nevertheless, for all that, I am Edwin Drood, or rather was—*was*.

“ Let me return to that evening when I was destined to die, and yet to live—a strange anomaly. I cannot quite understand it myself, and if others cannot either, it will not be surprising.

“ My uncle, Mr. John Jasper, had invited me and young Landless to a bachelors’ dinner in the Gate House, for the purpose of our becoming reconciled ; and also of showing to the world, which (that is to say, that bit of the world, Cloisterham) had taken a very absurd interest in our foolish quarrel, that we were reconciled.

“ I did not like Mr. Landless ; not even without the particular reason which afterwards made us almost natural enemies, because his nature was so opposed to my own, and so superior, as I could not but acknowledge, that I fear I was jealous. He was about the same age as myself, and yet so different ; so grave, earnest, and manly that I felt at a disadvantage beside him, and for the first time in my life confessed myself the “ stupid boy ” Rosa, so often to my displeasure, called me, which I intended, once and for all, sternly to prohibit, when our union had removed me from the subordinate position of lover into the superior one of the husband, whom it would be her duty to obey. I meant to be kind and indulgent to my pretty wife, but to show her, in good time, who was to be master ; and I had no intention of putting up then with her ‘ nonsense,’ as I called it, as I had been obliged to put up with it, during our unromantic courtship.

“ Ah me ! when I think of my folly, and to what depths of misery it might have brought us—misery even worse than that I suffer now—but for the courage, energy, and noble nature of the pretty little creature whom I, in my arrogance, considered so inferior to me, yet who, upon an eminence far above, had been quietly

reading and understanding every foolish purpose of my foolish heart, I am so ashamed of the boy, whose name I must assume again, that it increases my dislike to do it.

“ And here was this young fellow, treated by every one with marked respect ; spoken of as ‘ Mr. Landless ’ and ‘ Mr. Neville,’ while I was only ‘ young Drood,’ or ‘ Eddy,’ or ‘ Ned,’ or idiot and booby, perhaps, behind my back, if I did but know it. Just at the very time, too, when I would have wished to show a polish, equal to those of my brightly-shining leather boots, bought to satisfy Rosa, and which glared at me, as my downcast eyes rested there in despair at my fancied ignominy, as if they were impertinently pointing out to me the contrast between my dullness and their brilliancy.

“ For, the stately figure, dark beauty, and brilliant eyes of the sister of this young man had already made so deep an impression on me, that I felt an intense desire to appear at my best, instead of, as I was conscious of doing, at my very worst.

“ As I sat opening and shutting Miss Twinkleton’s fan, apparently my thoughtless self, and treated by everybody (so I imagined) exactly as Jack often treated me : like a fortunate fellow who had won the first prize in a lottery, without, of course, ever having done anything to deserve it, I was seized with an almost irresistible impulse to fling the fan into the face of that stuck-up and coxcomb brother who so coolly put me aside, as if, being the winner of the first prize, I could be no possible competitor for the second.

“ I dare say there are many men, and women too, who, having won something rare and beautiful, are apt to regard it with an indifferent eye, as having lost its value through possession. That was my case. I was fully aware that my lovely betrothed was a jewel beyond price ; but it was *mine*, and had been mine so long that I had grown accustomed to its beauty, even

fancied I could detect flaws in it, and was half weary of what I had attained without any trouble.

“And might I not dare to admire another? Why, he, the coxcomb brother, was casting looks of fiery admiration at *my* possession, and *I* didn’t mind.

“No! the reason which Cloisterham assigned for it was not the reason why I did not like Landless. Rosa was so certainly mine, that it only gratified my vanity to see her admired. Just as if she were a valuable jewel, of which I was the possessor and which I could feign to regard with indifference, although I was willing to acknowledge that she would make a pretty ornament, with the sharp corners, which wounded me, rounded off, and set in our married home, of which I was to be lord, and she the dutiful wife.

“So, in my way, and shown according to my nature, which was not explosive like his, I was quite as full of passionate dislike towards Landless as he towards me; and I wish to state emphatically, now, with the knowledge of the suffering he has endured since then brought forcibly home to me, that I was the provoker in the quarrel between us; and that though his hot and fiery disposition may have blazed up with peculiar readiness at the first contact with the match I lit, yet I was the one to cause the explosion, and that I humbly pray him to forgive me, as I have prayed God to do so, although I can never forgive myself.

“Mr. Grewgious—you to whom I address these pages—my noble benefactor! my truest friend! you were the first to open my blinded eyes, and show me what love, true love towards a chosen wife, ought to be. Not that I comprehended clearly, at first; yet I tremblingly felt that I was on the verge of an abyss, and that a few more heedless steps might be fatal to both Rosa and myself. And if I know now, that which I dimly felt then, what true love is, the agony of soul the knowledge has brought me may atone perhaps in some measure for my reckless folly.

“From your honoured lips (inspired almost as it seems to me ; or had you discovered the real nature of the chains, already galling, which bound us two young things ?—young enough to have aroused sincere pity for the fate impending), I learned in what hallowed light a man ought to regard the woman he would make his wife. Not as an ornament for himself, or for his house ; not as a toy to play with, or to cast aside heedlessly, when tired of it ; not as a child to be loved and caressed, petted or punished ; not as his housekeeper, and possible mother of his children—his absolute property anyway, and to be treated ill or well, according to his sovereign pleasure. Ah ! as none of these, for either misery, absolute misery, must be the inevitable result, or cool indifference, almost sadder still. As the light of his life he must regard her, sent by heaven to brighten the dull round of earthly duties, and make them not only bearable, but pleasurable, for the love of her—as the completion of himself, the other half which makes him first into a whole. No angel, for an angel would not suit his nature, but a human being like himself ; and I wonder, as I write, at the marvellous stupidity which would set the sexes in opposition, or venture to compare them, when it was so evidently the intention of the Creator that the one should be the complement of the other.

“But I am digressing, and am almost inclined to leave out the last paragraph, as the crudeness natural to a youth who, though feeling so old—so old, has been an inmate of the world he criticises, only, after all, twenty-one years. Yet the solitariness of my present life is favourable to reflection, and I do reflect, and have reflected much, more than is healthful probably.

“You will have heard an account, no doubt, of my last interview with Rosa, for later events would impose on her the necessity of revealing it. I had gone to her with more real humility than I had ever felt before, I think, and yet with a half-feeling of pride too, that I

should be the one to open her eyes, as you had opened mine.

“ Alas for my foolish vanity, doomed to so complete a humiliation ! Before I had time to begin my exposition and to consult with her as to whether, after all, we loved each other sufficiently to venture upon a life together, she was speaking to me, and with no uncertain sound. She, whom I had looked upon as a pretty toy, almost incapable of earnest thought—she, with no one to help her, had been entertaining the same doubts for many months, to which my foolish brain had only just given access, through the agency of another.

“ I acceded to her proposition that we should dissolve our engagement ; how could I do otherwise, with my own newly aroused doubts to back her up ? though with a heavy heart. I felt so deeply grieved, that it surprised me myself. I supposed I had sense enough to feel that I had not only lost a beautiful jewel, but a loving woman, the depths of whose generous and earnest nature I had never thought of sounding.

“ Therefore, I was no longer angry with young Landless, or resented his mean opinion of one who had sunk so low in his own estimation. And as the face of his beautiful sister rose vividly before me, I almost felt a wish to become his friend, and thus pave the way towards the winning of the second prize, now that I had lost the first.”

Mr. Grewgious, listening with rapt attention, was surprised to see the Minor Canon suddenly lay down the manuscript and energetically and almost angrily attack the waning fire. Perhaps the clergyman's gentle heart was wounded and mortified at hearing, for the second time, his beautiful choice spoken of as an inferior prize ; perhaps some spark of latent jealousy was fanned into action, by this reference to her in connection with another. But the momentary irritation faded and gave place to a look and smile of happy confidence, and before the Collector of Rents had quite

had time to screw his eyes into the right focus for observing him, he had resumed his reading.

“ Yet, notwithstanding this new fancy, my sad heart told me that no woman could quite replace my pretty Rosa ; and my feet, sore with the rough walking in the valley of humiliation, grew impatient to carry me away out of dull Cloisterham, where the pain was most acute. That Christmas Eve I said good-bye to it in imagination, and shed some of the bitterest tears I had ever shed till then. My heart was heavy with gloomy forebodings, as though I were destined never to see the old familiar place again. I did not know that it was not Cloisterham I was going to lose, but my own identity.

“ The dinner was a dull affair enough. Landless and I had met with every appearance of frank cordiality before Jack joined us. It was well he did, not that there was any danger of our quarrelling again—we were both too depressed for that, he as well as I—but to raise our spirits which, after the first spasmodic effort at cheerfulness, were sinking fast again. I don’t know what was the matter with him, but I could not help remembering with a sharp pang of jealousy, the first pang I had ever felt from that source, and now I had no right whatever to feel it—that if I was free to cultivate the acquaintance of his sister, he was also free to make love to Rosa ; and wondering if he would have the infernal impudence to do it.

“ My sadness, during the progress of the meal, seemed to undergo a sort of fermenting process, and to be gathering into anger, rapidly. Not particularly with Landless. With everybody, myself most of all. What a sheep’s head I had. What a blundering fool I was ! Such were the compliments I showered upon myself incessantly and unmercifully. I wished I had been a boy again, and that somebody would give me a sound flogging. I so richly deserved it, that I almost longed to suffer the pain and humiliation. The smart

of the body might act as a counter-irritant to the smart of the mind, and do me good.

“But unfortunately there was no one possessing authority enough over me to try this remedy, and I went on getting angry with every one in turn. There were Mr. and Mrs. Tope, she one beam of horrible congratulation on the nearness of what was never to be; he coarse enough to whisper in my ear, as he handed me the potatoes, ‘I’ve promised Mrs. Tope a new gownd for the occasion, and I don’t grudge it, Mr. Edwin.’ I could have knocked him down upon the spot, but, restraining myself, only refused potatoes with a sharpness that must have brought him to his senses, or, at any rate, to a sense of his position.

“There was Jack, too, so remarkably lively and gay, that I nearly worked myself into believing he did it to insult me. But as I saw in his face, turned towards me lovingly as ever, nothing but the well-known look of engrossing affection, I was so ashamed that I could have sobbed out like a naughty but penitent child—‘Oh, Jack, for mercy’s sake, fetch the thickest stick you’ve got in the house, and break it over my ungrateful back.’

“It was a gloomy dinner, in spite of all Jack’s efforts to make it cheerful. I don’t know whether it was a sort of reaction from the melancholy which had oppressed me all the day, or whether I was in the firts stage of an illness, as I have sometimes thought since, but even as the wind out of doors began to rise into fury, so my whole nature, body and spirit, did the same, and it was as much as I could do to repress all outward sign of the storm within me. As for Landless, his smiles were so forced and constrained that, even in my excited state, I could almost have pitied him. It was an egregious mistake of Jack’s, to bring two young men, with such a marked want of sympathy between them, together for a whole long evening. We ought to have shaken hands in the open street, and then have gone our different ways.

“ And even Jack’s manner appeared to me unnatural on closer scrutiny. He was unusually gay ; quite excited, in short. When, at last, he proposed my health, happiness, and prosperity, particularly with regard to a certain near event, which he need not further specify, I felt almost frightened at the look with which he accompanied his words. The scalding tears of anger and mortification rose to my eyes, and had to be swallowed with the ruby wine, which sickened me.

“ I was heartily glad when the dinner was over, and Jack sat down to sing and play to us. It was a relief to escape for a time the steady, searching gaze, almost always resting on my face. I began to think he must, in some way or other, have heard of my loss. If I had not promised Rosa, I would have told him all about it, I thought ; I so longed for sympathy—I so longed to pour out my sorrows into a friendly ear. Anything would be better than this feeling of absolute loneliness ; even severe reproof.

“ The storm raged furiously all the evening, and when Landless took his leave, Jack proposed that I should go down to the river with Landless to see to perfection the grandeur of it. I did not want to go, I am sure, for, though never before sensitive to atmospheric influence, this storm seemed to be raging all at me, and its echo resounding in my heart. And the wind, to my fancy (although I wasn’t a bit sentimental or fanciful by nature), *would* remind me of a drunken old woman, who had begged of me that afternoon, and who had told me in going away, that I might be thankful that my name wasn’t Ned, for Ned was in danger of his life. I had made light of it at the time, but I couldn’t make light of it now, because the wind, howling in my ear, kept saying, ‘ And you are, are, *are* Ned ; you know you are.’

“ ‘ Oh, Rosa, Rosa,’ I sobbed, as, after having taken leave of Landless in Minor Canon Corner, I fought my way back to the Gate House, through the storm, now

a perfect hurricane, 'you never loved me, I know, but I love you—I feel I do, now that all is over between us; and it is that which is making me so wicked and so utterly miserable.'

" 'You are, are, are, *are* Ned,' so the wind kept shrieking, with a voice that would not be silenced, until I should like to have stopped my ears to keep out the sound. 'You are, are, are, *are* Ned,' as I turned in under the gateway where Jack was standing waiting for me.

" It was so imprudent of Jack to expose himself so unnecessarily, with his delicate throat, that I was angry with him on his account at first. It was so aggravating of Jack to look after me as if I were a child who could not take care of myself that I was doubly angry with him on that account too. He must have noticed my irritation when I spoke, though I tried to subdue it.

" He wanted me to accompany him to the churchyard, to see, as I believed, some particular ravages which the storm had committed. I considered it the purest folly, trembling with cold as I was already, even in my warm great coat and fur cap drawn down over my forehead, and opposed it as energetically as I could.

" I was tired to death of the storm, and the monotonous warning of the wind, meaning nothing, of course, but not the less disagreeable to listen to. But I had to give way. Somehow or other I always had to give way to Jack when there was a difference between us: and I did so now as ever, though not without a feeling of resentment, and a touch of wonder at his almost passionate earnestness about such a trifle. But with no suspicion—no, not with a shadow of suspicion.

" 'You are, are, are, *are* Ned. You are, are, are, *are* Ned.' So the wind again, as it struggled to tear us from one another. But I clung to Jack, and he held me tight, and we defied the wind together—the moaning, wailing, baffled wind which fled, shrieking wildly. But it came again, and again, and again. Alas! my

ears were deaf to the meaning of the warning ! If I had but heeded it, I might have saved him, my wretched uncle.

“ How often God sends warning to those in danger, and how often they heedlessly neglect to profit thereby. How many sufferers, by what are called unforeseen events, must have been conscious of an inward voice, pointing out some possible danger, to which they turned persistently a deaf and careless ear.

“ Looking back upon my own experience, I seem to see the outstretched hand of God pointing ever towards the right and safe road, and know that disobedience to its behests, indifference to the inward warning, may lead to terrible danger, and cause endless suffering.

“ When we reached the shelter of the Cathedral, Jack bade me go on ahead. I was feeling strangely unwell, with a restless heat and pain inside me, to which I had hitherto been a stranger. Suddenly (I had raised my head to look up at the Cathedral, fancying it was something connected with it that I was to see) all the pain and uneasy sense of fullness in my chest and stomach rushed to my head. I saw the Cathedral totter and reel ; it was falling on me, and the next moment I lay dead beneath it.

“ Then a long blank, followed by a troubled dream. Jack and I were playing together, boys again. We were playing at horses, and Jack, instead of putting the bit between my teeth, had tied it round my throat—so tight, so tight that my head ached frightfully, and I could hardly breathe. He laughed at my distress, mocking me, while I feebly put up my hand to loosen it.

“ I was better now, though my head still ached as if it would split, and my tongue seemed so much too large for my mouth, that I wondered feebly how it managed to find room there. I was lying on my bed in the Gate House, and it was hard, and hurt me, and I could not remember, for the life of me, how I got there, and what had happened yesterday. I tried so hard to bring back

to my remembrance what happened yesterday, that I thought my aching head would burst. It was something of importance, I knew. Ah! I remembered it at last. I had been with Jack to see something; but what, I could not recall. Something in the churchyard; oh dear! what was it in the churchyard?

“Good God! the Cathedral had been blown down upon me, and I was dead, or if not dead, buried under the ruins, and doomed to perish of starvation. The agony of this horrible thought gave me strength to rise and push away something hard and heavy covering me.

“There was light somewhere, a feeble light, like the dim light of a lantern. It was a lantern, and Jack was lying beside it, dead too, with his glassy eyes wide open, and an awful look of terror on his ghastly face. And I—I was lying in a coffin!

“The dread, which every human being, in whom is still the breath of life, feels instinctively for this last house of the dead, made me exert the little strength I had, to get out as soon as possible; and only when I had accomplished this, and stood beside Jack, who was unconscious, and who lay rigid and motionless, I began to reflect.

“This was a vault, evidently, and we had both been cast into it by the fall of the Cathedral. But how did I come into the coffin? and who had put me there? I could not answer these questions, yet I avoided touching or rousing Jack, with a dread for which I could not account, and some impulse made me carefully replace the lid of the coffin before seeking means of egress; for I must get out of this horrible place, and hide myself from Jack’s glassy stare, which seemed to follow me menacingly, and note every movement I made.

“By the feeble light, I made out a few stone steps, up which I clambered, and the door above, yielding to my desperate thrust, opened, and let me out into the air. The storm had abated somewhat, though the

wind was busy still, and began again as soon as it felt my presence, though using one different word. It said no more, 'you are,' but 'you were, were Ned, you see.'

"By the fitful light of the moon, sometimes breaking through the driving clouds, I was able to make my way to a tall monument near at hand; for I was in the churchyard, and could see that the Cathedral, sound and massive as ever, was still standing where it had stood before.

"Behind the monument grew a weeping ash, whose low branches swept the ground, and under this shelter I crept out of the biting, mocking wind, and pitiless storm. I was tolerably protected there, and I cowered down upon the cold, damp earth, waiting.

"Waiting. For what, I did not know. Not for Jack, certainly, whom I had left behind in the vault, dead or swooning, and of whom I dared not think, for something too horrible to be entertained was dawning upon me, in spite of myself. A vision so terrible, that the mere notion paralyzed me. But my head was turned towards the little door, hidden from me now, as was the moon, and all my faculties were absorbed in it, and in dread waiting for the next manifestation.

"I have no notion how long I waited, with my eyes upon the fatal door, now fully visible in the sharp light of the moon, now lost in darkness, deep and awful. It might have been an hour, it might have been only ten minutes. I was not capable of connected thought, but crouched there waiting, waiting for what would follow.

"At last, at last, the door opened, and some one came out, carrying a lantern; the lantern which I had seen burning in the vault.

"I felt it was Jack, before I saw him. The wind told me so as it sped past me to the attack. The lantern was extinguished in a moment, but the moon shone out bright again between the driving clouds, and showed me his face in brilliant light.

"Then I comprehended all, with the rapidity and intensity of a flash of lightning; all, everything. I knew that Jack had meant to murder me. And I knew why.

"His face was sternly set, ghastly white, and awful to look upon, yet full of fierce triumph too. He was evidently entirely unconscious of my escape, for after quietly relocking the door, he looked up victoriously to the moon, his only witness, as he thought, and his lips parted in a smile.

"Such a smile! Oh, heaven, it has haunted my dreams for one long year, and I fear the remembrance will never be effaced, but will still haunt me to my dying day! Not that it was distorted or horrible. It was grand almost; like the fierce grandeur of a fallen angel, who has dared to cast down the gauntlet at the feet of God. And, though triumphant, it was remarkable, too, for a sort of unutterable sadness, as if a long-borne agony had fashioned it so for ever.

"Agony! oh, merciful God, what excruciating tortures must he have endured, to bring him to this. And if I could only have told him in time, he might have been saved, he and I also.

"I understood now Rosa's last look, that look of astonished and imploring enquiry. She had known that he loved her, and I, in my boyish folly and egotism, had never even imagined the possibility of such a thing. And yet I could have given her up to him, I could then.

"My heart ached with pity for the sufferings which my heedless tongue had inflicted, hundreds of times. How my thoughtless boastings must have lacerated his bleeding wounds. And he had warned me, too, tried to warn me, tried to save me if he could. Oh, Jack! Poor, poor Jack! My thoughtless hands had bound him daily upon the rack, until the torture had driven him mad.

"Now, thank God upon my bended knees, for having—

spared him this terrible crime, and having saved me from being cut off in my sins. I prayed as I had never prayed before, that He would support me with His gracious hand, and give me strength as long as I had need of it.

“ I scrambled to my feet again, and strove to think what was the best course to pursue. As I did so, I stumbled over the long ends of a silken scarf about my neck. With this he must have intended to strangle me, and must have believed he had.

“ I have thought since then, not at the time, for I was too confused, that this scarf must have got loosened somehow, when he was carrying me to the vault, and that in this way I was enabled to breathe again. Perhaps my uncle took no particular pains to make certain of my death after I lost consciousness, knowing that he was bringing me to a place where escape would be impossible. So it would have been, but for his swoon, which gave me time to fly. And yet I cannot believe that he could have contemplated the possibility of my being buried alive. No, I am sure, strange as it seems, that he believed me to be surely dead.

“ I was dressed in my usual walking costume, with my greatcoat on, and had even mechanically replaced on my head my fur cap, which had been lying beside me in the coffin. But my watch was gone. I knew that ; because as I wondered what the time might be, I had, instinctively, out of habit, laid my hand upon the watch pocket in my waistcoat, and had found it empty.

“ I must fly, fly while I had strength of body to do so—and I felt that would not be the case for long—for Jack’s sake, to save him from the consequences of his crime. I can truly say that, at that moment, I thought as little of myself as of any one else but him ; and as old remembrances of what, and how much, he had been to me all my life, came back to me in a flood, I only

longed to shield and rescue him, though he would never know it.

“ I was chilled to the bone, from lying on the wet grass, and trembling from head to foot, and the bitter, wintry blast, tearing over me like a flood, seemed to be carrying away, little by little, the feeble remnants of the life remaining to me. Yet I dared not die, for then I should be powerless to save him, either from the punishment of the crime to which a passionate love had brought him, or, still worse, from the crime itself.

“ Suddenly, as if a ministering angel had whispered it to me, inspired with heavenly pity for us both, I thought of the little flask of brandy, which Jack had given me to drink and warm myself with, before entering the churchyard. Had I got it by me still? If so, then it would impart new life, and we might both be saved—for this confused thought always rose uppermost to my bewildered brain, and was the one influencing me so strongly, that as no one would succeed in discovering my body, no one would be able to charge my disappearance against Jack.

“ Yes! I had it still in the pocket where I had placed it. Thank God, with all my heart and soul! I drank deep and long, and as the liquid fire circulated through every vein, rewarming and revivifying for a time, my powerless limbs regained some portion of their lost vigour, and were able to obey the commands which my brain had still sense and power to dictate.

“ Where I should go? what road I should take? or whither would my feet, left to their own free will, carry me? were questions which I neither asked nor could have answered. Anywhere, far away from Cloisterham, away from Jack, away from Jack’s possible accusers! So I sped into the night—the future as dark and overshadowed as the heaven above my head—the prospect before me as uncertain as the cruel and relentless, ever shifting wind.

“ On, through darkness which might be felt; my

progress one continual battle with the storm, many tongued, and which, when broken through, followed me, full of terrible forebodings. On, during the long night, of which so much remained, as to make me feel almost sure that I must have let the day pass me unawares. On, through the grey, reluctant morning, struggling against the necessity of appearing at all upon the scene. On, during the whole of the feeble, short-lived day, until darkness returned more friendly than the light, for it covered me up from the eyes of all men ; and then, night again.

“ At last I found myself looking curiously at myriads of shining stars, which looked back at me cunningly, and I said to myself, pressing a cold and trembling hand upon my forehead—‘ I am quite calm and clear, and not mad as the lying wind would tell me if I would listen to it. These are not God’s eyes which can see into my heart like those out upon the roadside. They are as weak and extinguishable as the men who lit them, and cannot read my secret, though they wink so knowingly. They are the lights of a great city. This is London ! ’

“ I have some vague idea that I entered a house here, rested, ate and drank. I cannot tell whether this is fact, or only fancy, induced perhaps by the body’s natural craving for sustenance and repose. A similar notion haunts me, that a number of people came peering around me with curious eyes, all eager to learn my secret, and that I asked them over and over again with increasing earnestness, to believe that it was not I who murdered Jack ; that no power on earth could have induced me to commit so foul a crime ; that he was my only relative and kindest benefactor, and that I would have died a thousand times over, rather than have done it. They would not believe me, and I broke through them again, and with beating and agitated heart ran through the lighted streets, until I made sure that either they had not pursued me, or that I had distanced them. But both of these notions may

have been only visions of my sick and excited brain.

"Then, I was in an omnibus—I have no idea how I got there—and rattling, rattling over the streets to—I knew not where. My head was aching horribly again, and the rattle of the vehicle seemed to go through it like a knife ; but I did not mind that so long as it was carrying me further away from Jack. For, now I had quite settled in my own mind, in spite of my obstinate denial, that I had really murdered him, and that his avenging spirit was pursuing me incessantly.

"I might have been a whole night in the omnibus, so interminable appeared the time, and my head every minute was growing worse and worse, when the vehicle stopped, and the few passengers descended—I among them.

"There was one man who got out just before me, and, not knowing what else to do, I followed where he led.

"He went on in advance, through several quiet streets, while I, with great effort, kept pretty close behind him. The streets were absolutely deserted ; no living soul to be seen but our two selves ; he, my unconscious guide ; I, following, I knew not whither. But for the lighted windows, here and there, it might have been a city of the dead.

"My strength to follow was nearly gone, and still my leader went on apace. I could keep up with him no more, and when, at last, he turned a corner and disappeared, I stopped.

"The rows of houses on either side began to reel and stagger, as I had fancied the Cathedral had done ; the lighted lamps danced up and down like Will o' the Wisps, and then began to fade. I raised my eyes in anguish to the stars in the calm heaven—those stars, which, on the lonely roadside, had appeared to me as the multitudinous eyes of an ever watching God—and commended my departing soul to its Creator.

“ There are philosophers, who have eaten largely of the Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge—more, perhaps, than any human being can digest—who tell us that the special interference of the Divine Author of our being, on behalf of one of His creatures, is, even for the Almighty, an absolute impossibility ; who declare that those eternal laws which Nature is compelled to follow, are not to be put aside or neglected even by their Maker. That not one of the millions of prayers addressed to God can be heeded or answered, and are in vain.

“ These doctrines are so terrible that the soul of a man in bodily or mental anguish instinctively refuses to believe in them, however convinced of their verity he may profess himself, when all goes well with him. As naturally as the child, understanding nothing of a mother’s love, turns to that mother in pain or suffering, for comfort or healing ; so the grown-up child turns to its Father.

“ Would the instinct be so universal if it were founded on a lie ? I cannot believe it. I am sure that in that last extremity, when no man was near to help me, God heard my unspoken cry for succour, and upheld me with His Gracious Hand.

“ For, at that moment, when I had given up the unavailing struggle to save myself and save Jack, and was perforce succumbing to my terrible fate, my eyes, nearly closing, were directed to a placard in a window near at hand, where I read the words quite plainly, although everything else was dim before my fading vision : ‘ Lodgings for a single gentleman.’

“ This was my haven—my shelter from the raging storm. The Hand of God was directing me, and I followed where He showed the way—followed trustingly though blindly.

“ I climbed the steps, rang the bell, and made application for the lodgings. A woman had opened the door in answer to my summons. I do not know what I said to her, or how I presented my case. The only sense or

wish left me was to hide and rest ; I either never thought about being ill, or must have fancied, that in seclusion and quiet, I should speedily recover. I remember seeing, or imagining, a look of indecision in her face—no wonder—and I pulled out my purse to show that I could pay. I had been saving up money to buy a fine present for Rosa, that last time I should see her before our wedding day, and had money in notes and gold. I remember this ; and that, all of a sudden, the woman and the furniture swayed to and fro, as the houses in the street had done ; I put out my arms to save her, and after that I remember nothing more.

“ Nothing more in reality, although the visions—the awful visions—that succeeded in rapid and bewildering succession, were as real to me as what I have told above ; and I should never have been able to draw the line—an uncertain one always—between fact and fancy, but with the help of the noble woman who saved me.

“ I had found my haven ! Through weeks of sickness, this woman sat by my bedside, nursing me—the stranger, whose former life, for what she knew, might have been deeply stained with sin, as if I were her brother. Through the labyrinth of contending fancies, when, Heaven knows, what horrors I may have revealed ! she guided me, and tended me, back to life and reason.

“ Poor herself, with daily necessity to labour for daily bread, she plied her busy needle night and day, watching by my bedside. Sickly, weak and delicate, she performed the labours of a giantess, and never gave way until success crowned her labours, and the sick man was rescued.

“ The first object my conscious eyes rested on was her gentle figure ; the first sound which I was capable of connecting with a cause, was that of the never-flagging needle ; and the first welcome back to life shone out of her earnest, softly-beaming grey eyes. Heaven bless and reward her !

" I was lying in a small room, scantily furnished with absolute necessities, but clean and exquisitely neat. On one side of my bed, daintily covered with a white counterpane, stood upon a table a little vase of spring violets, scenting the room with their fragrant breath ; on the other sat my ministering angel, her wonderful eyes, full of glad tears, fixed upon me.

" I felt so peaceful and so tranquil ; weak and trustful as a baby, who troubles itself not one whit as to what is to become of it, but leaves every care to the never-failing love surrounding it. I had never known my mother, who had died when I was born, but I could have imagined that the loving eyes were hers, and that she had come down from heaven to guard her orphan boy.

" I regained my strength very, very slowly, in spite of the most careful nursing. The shock to the constitution—so the doctor said—had been too great to admit of rapid convalescence. Also, with returning strength of body came intolerable anguish of soul. I had been simply happy to live at first, without caring why.

" Now I remembered that I had nothing to live for, and no means of living, and wished that I had died. I dare say this inward conflict retarded my recovery. But Nature and a good constitution were not to be foiled. I was doomed to live, as I said to myself bitterly, and now that I had saved Jack, it would be far better if I died.

" But there was a powerful reason why I dared not wilfully retard my progress towards health, and that was the necessity of being in a condition to provide for myself the means of sustenance, little as I cared to live.

" I thought about that late enough, more shame for me ! But when it occurred to me, and I sought for information from my gentle nurse, her evasive answers showed me the truth ; and I at length extracted from her unwilling lips the confession that my money was nearly exhausted. Not that that would have made

any difference to her—this good Samaritan. She would have worked for me and never let me know it ; but there was another person in the house—her mother and the mistress of it—who had been unfavourable to the keeping me from the first, and who now gave me pretty plain intimation that it was time for me to go.

“ I tried to get work, therefore—work which my previous education might have fitted me for (it was humiliating to feel, now that I had to bring my fancied accomplishments into the market, how little they were worth, and how very small a price would be paid for them), and I hunted up every likely and unlikely advertisement for a worker (how few they were, compared to the number of competitors for them), and traversed the whole wide city—North, South, East and West—to answer them. Alas ! without result, for if even the work were so simple as to leave no doubt of my ability to perform it, one thing always failed me : testimonials. Everything satisfactory up to this point, and my heart beating high with hope, the dreaded question would be the damper to extinguish it again : ‘ To whom can you refer for a character ? ’ And then the inevitable look of profound astonishment at the unmitigated impudence which could presume to hope to do without it.

“ Then it was, sir, that I lighted upon your advertisement. Despair was gnawing at my vitals, and I had almost abandoned hope, or I should have put it aside without a moment’s thought. But, standing thus between two fires—the possible chance of your recognising me, and the certainty of want—I dared to contemplate the possibility of entering your service, and yet effectually blinding you as to who I really was. If I should be successful in my application, and you should be willing to employ me, I could always take to flight again on the least hint of suspicion on your part.

“ If, on the other hand, I could disguise myself sufficiently to mislead you, then I should probably be

as secure in your office, from accidental exposure, as anywhere else. I little knew to what it would lead me, and what it would cost me, or I think I would rather have laid myself down on the roadside to perish.

“Not that you ever suspected me. My long illness ; the terrible shock to my system ; last, though not least, the hopeless search for work, had done their cruel business effectually enough, and rendered disguise almost superfluous.

“I dyed my hair and beard ; the fresh healthy colour of my face had faded to a deadly pallor, and I covered my eyes with a pair of blue spectacles. I had even practised a different tone of voice and manner of speaking, till I grew absolutely doubtful sometimes myself if I really ever had been Edwin Drood.

“You know the result, sir. I have little further to add, except that in my new position, the frequent and unavoidable contact in your office with yourself and others whom I had known and loved in my former life, and whom I neither dared to love or know now, caused me such poignant suffering as almost to unsettle my intellect ; and when I learned, from conversation between you and others, that my old rival, young Landless, had been accused of my murder, and that my uncle was the chief mover in the accusation, and was remorselessly seeking (or inventing) new proofs to hunt him down, and noted the suffering which this infamous accusation caused him—the innocent—I was torn with an agony of conflict as to what I ought to do. Ought I to deliver up Jack ? Ought I anonymously to warn him ?

“This anguish of mind, united to the anguish of being cut off from all near and dear to me, drove me to the verge of self-destruction. I have stood upon the brink of the river, thinking it was whispering to me to come to its bosom, and rest there from the toil of the battle. But that God, long-suffering and full of tender mercies, once more graciously interfered to save me from this most fatal crime, I should never have written

these lines, and never been able to save my uncle after all.

“I resolved, finally, to watch my miserable uncle closely, to interfere, if absolutely necessary, to save Rosa from the terrible fate of being united to him, and to save poor Neville from a further accusation. Otherwise I would remain, all my life, lost and dead. Robert Brandis’s chances of happiness in the world, poor as they were, were greater, after all, than Edwin Drood’s ; and I could not—could not resolve to give up my uncle, once so dearly loved, to the punishment of his crime.

“Now the case is altered ; now, the crime has been brought home to him without my agency ; and I only seek, before leaving England, for ever probably, to prove to the world, with your assistance, now that you are in possession of the details of my escape, and proofs of the verity of my words, that Jack cannot have murdered me, because I am alive.

“EDWIN DROOD.”

CHAPTER XIX

CODDLER AND HIS MISSION

THE Revd. Septimus, laying down the manuscript, uttered a deep sigh of conviction and relief, loudly echoed by Mr. Grewgious, who, from eager interest in the story, and anxiety not to lose one syllable of it, had hardly ventured to breathe during its perusal.

"Who could have foreseen it?" enquired the Collector of Rents, appealing to the ceiling.

"Who, indeed?" said Mr. Crisparkle, appealing to the window curtains.

"I shall never forgive myself!" said Mr. Grewgious, smiting himself anew upon the breast.

"Nor I, either," said Mr. Crisparkle, following his example.

"Lord love us!" broke out Mr. Grewgious again, in his agitation.

"May He ever do so," answered the clergyman.

They were interrupted at this point by a rap at the door, followed by the appearance of the housemaid, who announced a gentleman, "leastways one of the gaolers from the prison."

It was the gaoler who had conducted Mr. Crisparkle to the cell of John Jasper, on the occasion of his visit there, and who, now entering, saluted the clergyman respectfully, but at the same time with the easy manner of an old acquaintance. His face was decently mournful, like the face of one who bringeth evil tidings, yet elated, too. After working his auditors into a fever by the circumlocution of his opening remarks, and at last being brought sharply to the point, he proceeded:

“ It was damp and chilly, this morning, as you are no doubt aweer on, gentlemen, and must have rained all night, for the water stood in little pools still in the courtyard. I never had so much trouble to open the door of his cell, as I had then. I was afraid the lock was hampered, and was forced to put down my breakfast-tray to turn the key. When I got in, I could see nothing at all, at first ; but, gradually, by the light shining in from the passage, through the door and the grating above the door, I could make him out, crouching in a corner.

“ ‘ Good morning,’ I said, cheerfully. I’m always cheerful with the prisoners, when they behaves themselves ; when they don’t, I downs upon ’em wiolent, and that soon settles their hash. It ain’t no effort to me to be cheerful. Many o’ my mates is a’most as low and gloomy as the prisoners themselves ; they says the sight on ’em makes ’em dumpy, and the prison hatmosphere preys upon their sperrits. That’s curious, ain’t it ? but man’s a riddle, never yet solved, gentlemen. ‘ Good morning,’ says I. Then I stopped, surprised, for notwithstanding the cheerfulness of my manner and the inspirin’ natur’ of my words, he made no answer.

“ ‘ Sulky,’ says I, pretendin’ not to mind, though all the while I felt oncommon queer, for he crouched there so still, and there was a nasty, sickenin’ scent about the place which neither the coffee nor the rasher could quite get the better on. And there was a creepin’ in the small of my back, gentlemen, that meant something onpleasant, though what, I couldn’t tell.

“ I stooped down to give the prisoner a shake and rouse him up, for I thought he must be dozing in the corner : he was half-sitting, half-lying, with his arms extended and his hands clasped, and his head was sunk low upon his breast. Then I drew back the hand which I had stretched out to touch him, and cried out loud, for he was wet, too, though not with water, and

the pool in which I was standing, gentlemen, was blood."

"Blood ? "

Both listeners had echoed the word simultaneously. Mr. Crisparkle was leaning forward with wide open, terrified eyes upon the speaker. Mr. Grewgious had covered his with his trembling hands. The keeper uttered a sigh for decency's sake, but returned Mr. Crisparkle's gaze with a look of heartfelt satisfaction as to the state to which he had reduced them, and which it was impossible for him to disguise.

"Blood, gentlemen ! And what's more, human blood, gentlemen. Thickening a'ready and sickening, too, gentlemen. I upped and ran to the door in a winkin', though I was all of a tremble. There was one o' my mates coming down the passage. I called him in, and together we examined the body. He was dead and cold. For the second time he'd been and committed suicide, and this time no power on airth couldn't bring him back to life again. We found the bit of broken plate, lying beside him, with which he had cut open a vein at his wrist, and so bled to death, gentlemen."

CHAPTER XX

EDWIN AND ROSA

IT had been necessary, of course, to acquaint Rosa with the fact of Edwin Drood's re-appearance, and also of the death, in the prison, of his and her most cruel enemy ; and although these communications had been made with the tenderest care and forethought for her condition, the startling intelligence had so affected her, that a relapse, sufficiently severe to re-awaken the liveliest fears, had been the immediate result. She had earnestly asked to see the recovered lover of her childish days, whose supposed death she had so deeply and sincerely mourned, but the doctor had peremptorily refused assent until she should be better, and her nerves stronger to support the agitation of the interview. Thus some weeks had elapsed, during which Edwin's claims had been legally and undoubtedly established, the dead body of the suicide committed to dust, and popular excitement lulled again, before the two, separated by so strange a destiny, and brought together again by a destiny stranger still, met face to face.

Rosa, from whose pale cheeks the faint roses, which returning health had brought there some weeks before, had again taken their departure, was sitting, carefully wrapped up, in a low rocking-chair by a blazing fire, when the grave, hollow-eyed, bearded young man, whom henceforth she must receive as Edwin Drood, accompanied by Mr. Grewgious and Mr. Crisparkle, came in and stood before her.

They had told her that she would fail to recognise

him, as others had done. They had gently, but firmly, prepared her for the startling change which illness and mental agony had wrought in him. They had reminded her of the ravages which a terrible storm may work in a few short hours, and had told her not to forget that he had been struggling with the storm for one long year.

But they were wrong, wrong. She knew him—would have known him anywhere, with the quick, superior instinct of a true woman, who does not wait to calculate or prove, but simply feels. It was he, and not she, who was startled and alarmed. Was that puny, pale little creature in the low chair, the blooming girl whom he had left? He drew back, startled and inexpressibly shocked, burying his face in his hands.

“Eddy, Eddy!” she cried, pathetically, stretching out her wasted hands. “Come to me, brother. Nearer, nearer! Let me touch you, brother. Let me be quite certain that I have you once more.”

The same sweet, familiar voice! More soft and womanly than of yore, and without a shadow of the former petulance; yet with the old musical ring in the tone of it. He came forward, vainly endeavouring to master the emotion which the sight of and the change in her awakened, sank upon his knees, and laid his head upon her lap.

There was silence in the room, only broken by the low and subdued, yet plainly audible, weeping of the young man. Mr. Crisparkle and Mr. Grewgious had turned aside to hide their starting tears from one another, with that strange shyness which men exhibit on giving way to an emotion which only does them honour. And bright drops from Rosa’s eyes were falling thick upon the young man’s shining hair. When the girl spoke again, and she was the first to regain her composure and to do so, the two elder gentlemen quietly left the room, and the two alone together.

The young man wept still, though more quietly,

the while she tried to comfort him. The joy of hearing her, and resting there; the intense happiness of knowing that her recognition of him had been complete and instantaneous; the sorrow of finding her so sadly changed; the mingled feeling of gladness and pain at her re-assuming, as the natural one, the new relation which they had agreed, in their last meeting, to adopt towards one another—all these things so unmanned him that he could form no other wish than that he might kneel there for ever, at the feet of the woman he had learned to love, too late.

“Eddy, dear, look up and let me see you,” she said at length, when she had exhausted all her resources of comfort for him, and he still knelt motionless.

He raised his tear-stained face instantly. How different from the old time when he had been united to her by a far nearer and dear tie. Now her slightest wish was his law.

“Do my looks frighten you, Rosa? Am I a terrible object?” he enquired, earnestly.

She laughed, almost merrily—

“You are grown into a man, Eddy, as I am grown into a woman, and I don’t think you are a bit the worse for the change; only you are too grave and sad. But by-and-by you will get the better of that, and it’s not your fault, poor boy!”

The sweet naturalness of her manner, which seemed to bridge over the gulf that had yawned between them, and to make a way for his clumsier man’s feet to pass to her, was inexpressibly loving and beautiful. All the awkwardness and strangeness of their position towards one another melted away before its influence, like morning mist before the sun. Yet there was no idea of encouragement in it to any possible renewal of the rent bonds between them. Though she had torn down one barrier, which might have kept them strangers all the rest of their lives, her delicate womanly instinct had instantly erected another, finer, subtler, but not a

whit less tough. She was his warmly interested friend—his loving and affectionate sister ; nothing more.

“ Rosa, darling sister, can you really forgive me my share in your sufferings ? forgive me the relationship with your persecutor ? ”

“ Was that unhappy man not yours, also, Eddy ? We have both suffered—you, ten thousand times more than I—both innocently, and both, perhaps, in part justly. Let us forgive him, Eddy. Let us remember that his power to injure us is gone, and that we have no right to judge him any more, for he has been judged by God. And having forgiven him—with all our hearts, brother—let us strive to forget. For his sake, and for our own, let us strive to forget.”

She was right. He had forgiven all the injuries he himself had suffered, long ago, and if he still felt resentment, it was only on her account. She was right. From that moment the name of the dead man was not spoken between them. They shed together a few last tears over his grave before leaving him to his Creator.

“ And now, Eddy, dear,” began Rosa, in a sprightlier tone, after a short period of reverential silence, in which they had taken a final farewell of the dead, “ now, Eddy, dear, let us talk about our plans for the future, and what we both mean to do in the life—the long life, possibly, for we are both so young still—which lies before us. Let us begin with you, Eddy, because you are far the most important, you know. What are you going to do ? ”

Could she not understand the yearning look in his wistful eyes, or would she not ? Was her usually keen instinct quite unaware of the passionate longing of his heart ? However that might be, she made no sign, and waited quietly, unmoved (so he thought), for his answer.

“ Mr. Grewgious, Rosa—my best friend and almost father, whom I love and reverence more than words

can tell, and whom it is my pride and pleasure to obey—tells me I must go to Egypt, and assume the place and position there which belong to me by inheritance, and for which I have been educated. It seems a little hard to have to leave my friends again so soon, after my year of cruel banishment; but he thinks it best, and if you advise it too, Rosa, I will go."

He had tried to speak hopefully and cheerfully, but the effort had only made the heart's sadness which rang through his words more apparent. He hoped, perhaps, that she would try to dissuade him; at all events, express some sympathy for him, perhaps even say how sorry she would be to lose him. But though she remained silent for a few moments, when she spoke at last, her voice was clear and calm.

'Yes, Eddy. That will be the best thing, certainly. There's nothing like earnest, hearty work to keep down all sorrowful thought; and in a strange country, with nothing to remind you of old scenes and old events, you will soon outlive your troubles, and grow into a bright and happy man again. It may be a sharp remedy, Eddy, and need some courage on your part, but it is a sure one.'

"Then I will go, Rosa. The sooner the better. No one can be more anxious to get rid of me than I am to get rid of myself."

Taking no apparent notice of the bitter disappointment which had found utterance in the last words, she went on in her soft, sweet voice, pouring balm into his wounds.

"And you will not forget your sister in England, Eddy," she said, affectionately, laying her small, white hand gently on his clustering hair, "you will write to me sometimes, and tell me what you are doing, and how you are getting on, and all your triumphs of engineering skill in the far country which I used to tease you about when I was a self-willed girl, who needed some sorrow to curb her waywardness."

It was a dangerous thing to have reminded him of, as she read in a moment in his upturned face and eager eyes, and she continued hurriedly—

“But your sister is older and wiser now, Eddy, and even if she were not that last, she promised never to tease you any more, if you recollect, and means to keep her word. So you must make her your *confidante*, and be sure that she will always feel a loving interest in her brother, and prove herself worthy to be trusted in. And if, Eddy, the time should come, as it will, no doubt, when (she hesitated a moment, then went on steadily) you fall in love with some sweet girl, who loves you dearly in return, brother, then you must tell me all about it, and must tell her of the little sister whom you left behind in the old country, and who will love her, too, for her dear brother’s sake.”

His face, which had been flushed from weeping and excitement, paled as she spoke, and his eyes rested upon the sweet lips uttering his doom, with sadness unspeakable, and almost with reproach. He was going passionately to repudiate the idea that he would ever marry, and thus reveal a secret which his conscience told him it would be base and cowardly to tell now that it was too late, and which would, perhaps, completely alienate her. But he stopped in time.

“Yes,” he answered, so quietly as to be barely audible, “when I fall in love and marry, I shall certainly tell you of it.” Then, with effort, “Now that I am settled and done for, tell me what is to become of you?”

She breathed more freely, and a look of anxiety which had overshadowed her face, brightened into a smile of relief. She knew that they had been treading dangerous ground, although she herself had been the leader there. Possibly she had wished to avoid ground more dangerous still.

“It is nice of you to want to know, Eddy, dear, and I am so glad to have a kind listener to tell it to. I have

thought about it a good deal lately, because I foresee that I shall soon be terribly in the way here, kind as they all are to me. I sometimes have been so silly as to cry a little when I was alone, and to fancy myself solitary and uncared for. But it was ungrateful and wicked to think it, for I have so many more kind friends than I deserve ; and now I have got you, my brother, I am quite content and happy."

She squeezed his hands, resting in hers, and smiled as he gently touched hers with his lips.

"So I have made a little plan, Eddy, which will be charming ; and if my guardian will consent, and I think he will, for he does everything—dear, good man!—to please me, I hope to carry it out. For, one thing is certain, I can't stay here much longer."

"Why, Rosa ? "

"Oh ! I hope I know what is proper and what is not," she answered, laughing and blushing, and looking mischievously at him out of her dancing eyes. "But it's a secret, and I can't tell you, unless you are clever enough to guess, Eddy. Try."

"How can I guess, Rosa, without a particle of clue ? "

"Dear me, Eddy, you are quite as stupid as you used to be ! Oh ! I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to say that. But confess that you are a little wee bit of a goose after all. I should have guessed it in a minute."

Had she been talking about a possible wife for him in Egypt as a preparation—a merciful preparation—for what she had in store for him, on her own account ? Must she leave the house in Minor Canon Corner, in order to sacrifice to the proprieties, before returning thither as its mistress ? His fears, blinding him, as unreasonable fears always do, presented this interpretation of her words as the only one possible. He had never thought of Mr. Crisparkle as a suitor to the girl whom he had learned to love in losing, until he now thought of him as a successful one.

"Is Mr. Crisparkle——? " he asked, in very agony, as

the hopes he cherished, in spite of his all-but certainty in their fallacy, faded away to nothing.

"Charming, Eddy! No, you are not stupid, but the cleverest of boys."

"Going to be——"

"De—li—cious!" exclaimed Rosa, in an ecstasy, clapping her hands, "I have heard, somewhere, that, if women are quick, they are shallow, and that men, though slow, are deep, and it is true, Eddy. Now, I hope that compliment has quite purchased my pardon for calling you (unintentionally, I am sure) stupid. Go on, Eddy, you are as warm as warm can be."

"Married, Rosa?"

She sprang to her feet, and tried to dance across the room in her old wild way. It was a failure; her feet were not strong enough for dancing yet, but the effort showed the lightness of her heart. He caught her frail figure, and replaced it in the chair. She little knew how sadly.

"When I've got my breath, Eddy, I'll tell you something more. In the meantime, guess who it is."

"I can't guess, Rosa."

"Not guess, after guessing so famously. Well, I'll give you a hint—a very broad one. It's an old flame of yours, Eddy—oh, my eyes were sharp as razors, and I saw—and the handsomest girl in Cloisterham."

"Then it must be you, Rosa." Yet his heart was lighter already.

She laughed; such a clear, joyous, ringing laugh. Mr. Grewgious heard it in the room below, where he was waiting, and he laughed, too, for very joy and sympathy. And Edwin Drood's fears fled away before it, back to that land of foolish fancies whence they came.

"Oh, Eddy, dear! do you think I am vain enough to call myself something that I never was, even before I lost my beauty, now that I have grown into a little fright?"

"You, a fright, Rosa?"

It was said with such genuine surprise, that it was worth a thousand asseverations to the contrary from one better versed in the art of paying compliments.

The girl laughed again. She had hardly laughed once in that old, wilful, charming way since he was lost, last Christmas Eve.

"It is very kind of you, Eddy, to pretend not to see it ; and I do hope, when my hair is grown again, that I shall recover some portion of my good looks, which I was so vain of once, and which I have abused so much since, and yet which I am so sorry to have lost after all. But, not to talk about that any more, guess who it is Mr. Crisparkle is going to marry."

"Since it is not you, Rosa, I do not care."

"But you must care, Eddy, because you are my brother, and because I care so much ; for she is my dearest friend, and has been my most loving nurse, and I am glad with all my heart to know that she will be so happy, for I love her dearly."

"Can it be——?"

"Yes, Eddy, dear," she answered with a smile and a tear, laying, with her old pretty naturalness, her small forefinger upon his lips to prevent the word hovering there from escaping them, "but don't speak it out loud, because they don't know it themselves for certain yet, though it's as plain as plain can be ; and I tell it to you only to prevent your cherishing any hopes in that direction, which would cause you and them needless pain."

What a wise little thing she had become ! he said, in one short year ; what a prudent and far-seeing little sister ! But there was no fear of that ; oh no ! no fear of that.

His sad earnestness seemed to strike her. She looked at him with a quiver, almost like fear, on her sensitive lips, and a faint shadow on her candid brow. But he returned her gaze so quietly, so true-heartedly, that she grew reassured.

"I hope it is no breach of confidence, Eddy, to have told you," she went on, after they had sat thus a few moments in silence, "and yet it can't be, either, for they have never confided in me; or a breach of—of——. Well, never mind what it is, if it is not wrong; and I do not think it can be that, for I only meant to avoid trouble in telling you. And besides, Eddy, I know you will be discreet, and not betray me."

She might be quite, quite sure of that, he said.

"I have seen it coming on for a long while," continued Rosa, delighted with the subject, and doubly delighted, like the majority of her sex in possession of such a secret, not to be obliged to keep it locked up within her own bosom, but to have found some one to whom she might dilate upon it, "they were made for one another. She is so grandly beautiful, so majestic, Eddy, that she kept all gentlemen at a distance, and I believe, although they couldn't help admiring her, they were all afraid of her, though she has the kindest and noblest heart in the world: but with him she is like a little child; so gentle and so humble, and as pliable as a bit of soft wax in his hands. He is moulding her into the gentlest, sweetest and loveliest clergyman's wife in all England, and when she is that, and the last touch has made her quite perfect for the office, why, then I should be terribly in the way, and that's the reason I must go."

"You in anybody's way, Rosa!" He seemed to think it an impossibility.

"Of course, Eddy. And I'm thankful that I've wit enough to see it, and instead of waiting to be turned out, have the sense to take my departure, so long as I can accomplish it with dignity. And now, Eddy, before proceeding any further, there's one thing I wish to mention seriously. I have found you extremely satisfactory, on the whole, and am very, very glad to have my dear brother again (affectionately), but I see the germs of a fault in you, which I never saw before,

and I want you, as far as I am concerned, to destroy them as fast as possible."

"If," he said, colouring deeply, "if she saw any fault in him, painful or disagreeable to her, and she would have the kindness to tell him what it was, he would not rest until he had conquered it. To do so," he added, "should be the chief object of his life."

"There you go, Eddy," she answered, "and that is just the very thing I mean. The chief object of your life must not be to please me. You must find a higher object than that, brother. And to tell you plainly what I mean: I have discovered in you a tendency to pay compliments, which I fear will grow upon you. I do not mean to say," she said, with the air of a connoisseur, "that you have attained any great proficiency in the art; but the wish to do so is too apparent; and if you have overcome many faults of your boyhood, and you have, I am sure, this is a newly-acquired one; for then, if I remember right, it was not a habit of yours, rather the contrary."

If she could have known how her words were torturing him. If she could have known how the remembrance of his careless and indifferent behaviour towards her in the old time was a daily agony for him now.

"And," she went on, quite unconscious of the pain she was inflicting, "brothers never pay compliments. I know that, because all the girls in the Nuns' House, who had any, said so. The principal use of brothers, Miss Williams used to say, was, that even truer than your own looking-glass they were sure to tell you, if you were not looking so fresh and bright as usual."

He would endeavour not to offend in that way again, although he had not been aware of having done so. And now (to change the conversation) would she not tell him where she was going?

"Certainly, Eddy, though I had nearly forgotten it. I mean, if he will have me, to go and live with my guardian. He is such a good, good man, and I love

him dearly, dearly ; and he is so lonely in Staple Inn and those dull old gloomy chambers ; so, one day, when I was thinking about him, and about myself, and feeling—I am ashamed to say it again, because it is so ungrateful of me—almost as if I were as uncared-for and solitary as he, this plan came into my head, and I said to myself : one and one make two, and two lonely ones together are not lonely any more ; and I can make him happy, and he me.”

“ Dear, generous Rosa ! ”

“ Eddy, I hope that’s not a—you know what, but really meant, and therefore I will pass it over, and thank you, too, for what is kindly intended, though undeserved, I am sure. Therefore, when he came to see me, so glad to find me better, and took me in his arms, calling me his dear child ! his pretty, blessed child ! and kissed me, till I felt his tears—an old man’s tears, Eddy—on my cheek, I made up my mind to be his child in reality, to devote my life to cheering his ; and in making him happy, I know I shall be still happier myself.”

Although the childish beauty—the fresh budding beauty of the growing girl—had faded, perhaps never to return, there was a far higher beauty shining through her radiant eyes, and refining and idealizing every feature of her earnest face.

If it had been possible for him, he thought, to love her better, he must have done so now, when he felt, as he had never felt before, that the beautiful body only held a soul more lovely still, which could never fade or perish.

“ I have a little money of my own, Eddy, so that I need not be a burden to him in that way ; and we might take a nice little cosy house in some pretty neighbourhood, not too far from Staple Inn ; and then some nice old lady must come and live with us, who will have nothing to do but doze comfortably by the fire, when he is at home, and be company for me when he is

at his office ; and when he comes home tired, Eddy, and fagged from his day's work perhaps, his daughter will be standing upon the doorstep to receive him ; to take nice walks with him in the summer evenings ; to sing and play for him in the winter ones ; to make him forget dull Staple Inn and all its account books and worrying clerks (forgive me, Eddy, I don't mean you), and wish the evenings were twice, three times as long as they are. Isn't that a charming prospect, brother ? ”

Oh, Heaven ! Such a charming prospect ! Oh, God, such a glimpse of Paradise, before the door is shut for ever ! Oh, what a reward to have been able to look forward to, if God had willed it, at the end of a long life's work ! Such were his thoughts, as he bowed his head to hide the starting tears he dared not let her see.

“ Thus the happy days will flow on, Eddy ; calm and peaceful, if God permits, and varied from too severe a sameness by the frequent receipt of letters from my brother in Egypt, who will not forget his sister, I know. And though Time will almost seem to stand still with my guardian, his loving daughter will grow, little by little, into an old maid—not a cankering, backbiting old maid, Eddy, I hope, but a kind-hearted, benevolent and happy one ; and as busy a little old maid, Eddy, as any under the sun.”

She felt long before he could utter it, the almost indignant negation to this last part of her plans, upon his lips, and held up her small hand to prevent his giving it utterance.

“ Don't interrupt me, Eddy, please, for I've nearly finished. There are sure to be some nice little children somewhere (and I'm going to be an old maid very fond of children) who are poor, and whom I can sew for, and make warm clothes for, when winter comes ; and poor old women, too, with asthma or rheumatism, who will let me visit them and bring them little comforts, such as broth, or jellies, which I will learn to make from the clever old lady who is going to live with us.

And then I think they may learn to love me, Eddy ; for love is something I do covet, and cannot do without."

Love her ! Who could help it ? One who lavished love on others so freely was sure of a return.

" And when my brother from Egypt comes to visit us—bringing a dear little wife—or, no, a big one : I haven't forgotten your partiality for big women, with big noses, Eddy (whimsically, and with a half-return of the old propensity to tease him)—and, perhaps, some dear little children, whom I shall love so much that they won't be able to help loving their aunty in return (and one of them must be my namesake, Eddy), then I shall be as happy a little old maid as can be. There won't be a little old maid in all England so happy as I."

If she could have known, that each loving word fell upon his heart like a coal of fire, how it would have wrung hers. If she could but have known !

He sat silent, with his sad eyes upon her. She thought he was pitying her for a fate which not all her bright hopefulness could induce him to concur in, as a suitable or natural one for her ; and his quiet compassion forced a tear into her eye.

" I don't mean to say, Eddy," she went on, more gravely, " that it's quite as brilliant or rainbow-tinted a life as I fancied mine was going to be when I was a babyish, ignorant girl in the Nuns' House. But my air-castles have melted away, one by one, and I'm too old and sensible now to build up any more such unsubstantial edifices. And now, Eddy dear, I hear Mr. Grewgious on the stairs, and I remember the doctor told me on no account to talk too much, or too long, and I've been chattering away all the time like a magpie. I'm afraid I must send you away for the present, if I am ever to get permission to see you again."

He rose immediately, holding out his hand.

Rosa, with an innocent and unconscious impulse, half-raised her sweet face to his, as if she expected,

and would have permitted, the accustomed caress, natural to the new and near relationship which they had adopted—still more natural to the old one they had abandoned, nearer still—that accustomed caress, which he had given and received so indifferently and carelessly in the old time, and which he would have given the world to have dared to accept now.

If she could have known—if she could have known, how gladly he would have given up every other hope in life to have dared to accept the priceless boon which she had offered him—all unconscious of its worth. If she could have known, that only the certainty of betraying himself, if his lips met hers, had made him turn away from a delight, sweeter to him far than anything in earth or heaven, and which, having once tasted, he must have striven to win for ever, or died in the attempt.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PASSING OF NEVILLE

THE good people of Cloisterham, though a little less wide-awake than was desirable, and a good bit behind-hand in certain new-fangled ways which circulated freely in the world without them, particularly in that great and mighty city (mighty for evil as well as good) removed so short a distance as to be almost a next-door neighbour, were not a particle less kindly at heart than other folks, who made more noise in the world than they, surrounded by so many evidences of sleep and slow decay, were ever likely to do, in the drowsy city of their birth ; and a Cloisterham conscience, once roused, was rather more restive than an average conscience on the whole, and capable of inflicting pricks in no way to be disregarded. Thus, the honest inhabitants of this ancient city, who had until now strongly sympathised with John Jasper, no sooner really comprehended (a slow process, for its worst enemy couldn't accuse Cloisterham of having a quick comprehension) that they had been upon a wrong tack, than they veered round completely to the other side ; and, in the enthusiasm for the falsely accused boy, and the furious indignation against his accuser, even the nephew, Edwin Drood, who had been the greatest sufferer, was neglected, or even looked upon askant, as an instrument, although an unwilling one, in the persecution ; for all eyes were directed towards the hero of the occasion—towards poor Neville. Every one wanted to atone in some measure for his own share in the persecution, and thus appease his troubled conscience, ere it was too late ;

for those who had eyes to understand the significant language of his wasted form and too brilliant colour saw in the lad's face the unmistakable signs of death. Alas ! popular adulation, or popular execration, were alike to him now, except for Helena's dear sake. For, before his earnest eyes turned towards a land afar off, the world, and the things of the world, were passing away.

Mr. Grewgious and Edwin Drood had returned to London, the latter to make immediate preparations for his voyage to Egypt, and the former to resume his duties in his neglected office, to try to make up for lost time, and to advertise for another clerk, to enter upon his work as speedily as possible. Rosa was quite "out of the sick list," as she said, and the roses in her cheeks had grown bold, refusing to evacuate their newly-won places any more. She had cast off the invalid, and taken her old place in the family circle, which she made musical with her sweet voice and simple songs. But the old doctor still came to Minor Canon Corner, and calves' foot jellies and chicken broth were daily prepared there as before, and voices were hushed, and tiny feet crept on tiptoe when another slept, for the place vacated was refilled by a new invalid, Helena's only brother.

Yet Neville's decline was so gradual, that the one who loved him most of all, whose life was, so to speak, bound up in his, refused to see it. If his cough was more wearing and constant (and it was), why, that was not surprising. It was winter-time, close on Christmas, and in spring it would be better. Other people had coughs and got rid of them. If his strength for walking far was gone, even when supported on her never-tiring arm (and it was), why, that was nothing to be alarmed at either. His sedentary habit of life in Staple Inn, his too close study, had pulled him down a little, and now that the weight, the intolerable weight, under which he had laboured, was taken off, now that all the world knew that he was no murderer, no base assassin,

the natural elasticity of his constitution would quickly re-assert itself. She put away the thought, the doubt, which would come sometimes, that—perhaps, perhaps? with indignation, as something sinful. Had God raised up for them such noble friends, cleared away the obstacles in their path, brought them so far on their thorny road, to blast His own work at last? Was not the fear sinful, and bitter wrong to Him. If that had been His purpose, then why had He not left them both to perish, and not mocked them with groundless hope. God forgive her for even this shadow of doubt in His goodness.

Having reached this point, Helena would begin again to bring forward further proof that she was right, though her sinking heart would sometimes warn her that her proofs were built upon the sand, even though she despised the warning. Was not his eye clear and bright? His brow free again from the melancholy which had overclouded it? Had his smile ever been so bright and sunny, his laugh, though feeble, ever so joyous? Thus she battled fiercely and ceaselessly with the doubt in the faces of others, and the doubt in her own heart, putting it away from her as if to harbour it were infamous.

Ah, how easy it is to persuade ourselves that what we earnestly desire is good and virtuous, and what we dread, bad and opposed to God's will! How easy it is, comparatively, to talk down our own conscience and bring forward a thousand arguments—indisputable arguments—to silence its remonstrances. Nay, there are some among us—many, may be—who have, by dint of a course of rigid discipline, so trained and cowed this "still small voice" as to have reduced it to the condition of a dog, well-accustomed to the whip, which wags its tail when they approve, and only dares to growl and show its teeth—all the more viciously for its constraint towards themselves—at the enormities of others; or like a clock which ticks and strikes when

they choose to wind it up, but is as mute and silent as the dead when they do not !

It was a touching, beautiful sight, to see the twin brother and sister together ; sometimes, on sunny days, walking arm-in-arm—not far, and in the immediate neighbourhood of Minor Canon Corner. Many, meeting the two and greeting them with earnest cordiality—for it was quite a matter of competition as to who should show them the most sympathy and kindness—particularly tender-hearted women, would stand still to look after them, as they moved slowly forward. “ Poor young things ! ” such a one would say, with her handkerchief or apron at her eyes, according to her position on the world’s ladder, “ Poor young things ! ”

It was beautiful to see them together, so much alike and yet so different. Both tall, slender, graceful ; the girl, straighter now, for her brother was forced to stoop to rest upon her arm. Both dark-haired and dark-eyed, with the same brilliant colouring on their dusky cheeks. Yet hers was the rich colour of vigorous health, melting imperceptibly back to the delicate ear and rounded throat ; his more sharply defined, that crimson tint, so beautiful to look at, and yet so unutterably sad ; that vivid colouring with which the most fatal and insidious of diseases marks its victims, like the red cross of the forester upon the tree doomed to fall. She, nourished upon an inexhaustible source of joy within her, growing every day into more exquisite beauty, and ripening in the sunshine of warmest and tenderest love, into the fullness and richness of a glorious womanhood ; he, ripening, too, but not for earth.

Often, they would walk in silence, each satisfied and happy in the society of the other ; each indulging in dreams of bliss for the future, bliss springing from sources as far apart as earth from heaven. Happy, too, in the friendliness of all they met ; in the beauties of nature, even in her sleeping-time ; in the removal of

the heavy cloud which had darkened their sunshine. Sometimes, they would talk—he chiefly, while she would listen. It was one of his chief pleasures to plan her future life, and, with a glad smile of comprehension on his lips, to tell her, that he felt sure that one so beautiful and good would make a happy marriage, and live a happy life ; and the smile would broaden, as he saw the answer to his unspoken question in the deepening of the colour on her cheek. Then, he would speak of their dear friends, and that he knew they would be true to her always ; would compare their happiness now with the desolation of their childhood, and tell her never to forget that all God's decrees are good ; adding fervently, each time, how very, very happy he was, and how devoutly thankful. And when she, on her side, would talk of his future, and of all that he would accomplish, when she would picture him as a brilliant and successful lawyer, reminding him that there was nothing now to prevent his pursuing his studies under the immediate superintendence of Mr. Crisparkle, the kindest and best of teachers, he would be silent ; only looking up yearningly to the deep blue sky ; and if there were a shade like trouble on his face, it was not on his own account. Oh, no ! not on his account, only on hers. After all, is it not a most merciful dispensation, blunting the edge of sorrow and preventing that foreshadowing of it, which is the hardest and most terrible to bear, that, where all around can see, love alone is blind ?

The end came at last, as it often does in such cases, suddenly and unexpectedly. Neville had seemed particularly bright all day ; and, as the weather was mild and sunny, he had, accompanied, of course, by his sister, who hardly ever left him, taken a few steps, about noontide, in the Close. But he soon complained of fatigue, and she led him home again.

When they entered the little sitting-room, arranged especially for them, she noticed how white and wan he looked, and rang for help. But before it arrived,

he had fainted away in her arms. Assisted by the frightened housemaid (who was only kept back from a fit of hysterics by the terrible look in the dark eyes—a look of fixed determination, which repressed her own agony in this dread moment as decisively as the foolish expression of fear in the maid), she carried him to his bedroom near at hand, and laid him on his bed.

Then, bidding the girl, in a hard, authoritative manner, first inform Mr. Crisparkle, and then fetch the doctor, she applied such simple restoratives as she had at hand, with the precision and exactness of a skilful nurse, and without a moment's pause for useless grief. In a few minutes, the Minor Canon, as quiet and self-possessed as she, was there to help her.

Neville opened his eyes at last, and turned them immediately towards his sister, as if the thought of her had never left him during his swoon, and concern for her was the only feeling which he could entertain. He was unable to speak in the first moment of consciousness, but the undying solicitude and love, which could only find expression in his brilliant orbs, lit with a new and unearthly light, was so moving, that it was more than Mr. Crisparkle or his mother, who had hastened to the scene, could bear.

But his sister met his look with a smile. Heaven knows what it cost her to smile at such a moment, for only Heaven knew what depths of heroism there were in that girlish breast! Even in mortal agony, worse than that of death—for what was her life to his?—she fiercely banished all sign of it from her face, which, though as white as her brother's, looked back at him steadily, with a reassuring smile. To spare his feelings at this supreme moment, she trod down her own.

Neville's feeble voice returned, though they had to bend their heads to hear it; he was understood to express a wish to be left alone with Mr. Crisparkle. Helena, without a word or sign of remonstrance, obeyed instantly, and followed the weeping china shepherdess

out of the room. Then, pale and rigid as marble, she remained standing on the cold stone floor of the little hall—in spite of the entreaties of Mrs. Crisparkle that she would come into the drawing-room and warm herself—so as to be near at hand for the re-summons.

At last it came. “Quick, Helena.” And she was standing by the bed and looking down upon her dying brother.

For he was dying. That look upon his face was unmistakable, even to a novice in such matters. Calm and sweet, but quite unearthly in its beauty, it seemed as if a reflection of a light from above irradiated and refined its perfect features into the likeness of a saint’s. For the battle of life which he had fought out almost to the end, though severe, had been but short, and it was the dawn of victory.

Mr. Crisparkle was standing beside him, and, as the sister entered, he said, in a clear, earnest voice, first looking at her, so dear to them both, as if she were included in the promise—

“Depart in peace, dear boy ; and may God do so to me, and more also, if I forget.”

Then he stooped over him and kissed the pale lips and forehead, clammy with the dews of death, and, withdrawing to the foot of the bed, left the twin sister alone in the place which was hers of right, and into which no other dared intrude.

She kissed him, too, without a sob or tear, and knelt down beside him. His wondrous eyes, the counterpart of hers in form and colour, settled finally upon her loved face, and remained there, steadfast and immovable, full of undying affection, until the light faded out of them on earth for ever, to be relit in heaven.

Helena had been carried out senseless from the room, where the dead body lay, by the doctor, who had arrived when all was over, and laid on her own bed, where she had been carefully tended until she recovered consciousness ; upon which, she had turned her face to

the wall, still tearless, and had shown such an evident wish to be alone, that they had yielded to this mute entreaty, and left her to herself.

Once or twice since then, Rosa had crept to the door of her room and listened ; but hearing no sound, had concluded that Nature was soothing the girl with her unfailing narcotic, and that she had forgotten her grief for the time in sleep.

At last, Rosa, too anxious and disturbed to be quite satisfied, had ventured quietly to open the door and peep in, when, to her terror and dismay, she discovered that the bed was empty, and Helena gone. They had sought her everywhere, and found her at last in her brother's room, lying upon the bed where he lay, and embracing the dead body.

Stretched out upon the bed where they had placed him until the last bed was ready, lay the dead boy, his hands folded upon his breast, as if in prayer ; the last heavenly smile, which had beamed upon his sister, still lingering on his lips ; and the long, black lashes of the eyes which had been closed after death, sweeping the pure, pale cheek ; and, by his side, one arm thrown around him, and the other hanging listless beside her, lay Helena.

It was a sight beautiful beyond expression, yet awe-striking, and almost terrible, too ; because the living part of the picture looked so like death, and the dead, with that sweet smile upon his face, that wondrous calm, those softly-folded hands, might have been only sleeping, and dreaming happy dreams. And he *was* only sleeping, although the radiant eyes would reopen, not to time, but to eternity.

The girl's long hair had escaped from the confining comb, and fell down, one thick, dusky mass, around her form ; her face was as white and still as the face of the dead, and her cheek, pressing his, so like in contour and colour, that they seemed to melt into one another, and to be, not two, but one.

Yet there was a look of pain and suffering in her face, absent from his, which was full of saintly peace ; and of unrest in hers, while in his was perfect rest. Yet notwithstanding this difference, and though her bosom rose and fell slightly—the only token of life—while his was still, they might have been supposed by a casual observer to be either both sleeping or both dead.

“ Helena,” said the Minor Canon, gently, advancing towards the bedside and speaking in a low, impressive voice, “ get up, dear girl, and come to us. You have been taking a last farewell of the dead brother—only gone before, remember that—and it is natural and excusable that you should do so ; but it must not last too long. It will injure your health and add to your grief unnecessarily. Get up, dear girl, and come to us who love you—love you dearly—and let us comfort you.”

She had started at the sound of the speaker’s voice—that dear voice !—and shivered slightly, but she remained silent ; only nestling closer to the dead brother, as if beseeching him to let her stay there.

“ Helena,” continued the Revd. Septimus, more emphatically still, and with a tinge of reproach in his voice, “ cannot you, always so brave, be brave even now ? To remain where you are is impossible, and must do you cruel harm. Try to remember what the dear lad would have wished ! Try to remember that he is not lost, but only gone where you, in the fullness of time, will follow him ! Exercise the noble self-command now, which you have shown so often ! For the sake of the dead, for the sake of the living, who suffer, in seeing you suffer, rise superior to this momentary weakness, I beseech you, Helena ! ”

His appeal was not without effect, though without the effect he desired. She did not attempt to rise even yet ; but she opened her dark eyes and fixed them upon him, as if to beg him not to be displeased with her, for she could not help it.

Then, at the sight of his troubled face, worn with anxiety on her account, the frozen fount of her tears began to thaw. Slowly creeping out from under her dark lashes, one or two large drops rolled down her face.

Now, Heaven be praised for this at least ; the healing tears began to flow ! But that was not enough ; the Minor Canon raised his voice again, this time with a sternness which alarmed his mother, and which she deemed almost cruel.

But it was the physician's skilful hand which wounds to heal, and which dares not hesitate or shrink from the work it as to do, because it must inflict, temporarily, extra pain.

" This is not only weak, Helena," he began again, " but it is wrong. You expose yourself, unnecessarily, to danger, and by so doing, increase our anxiety a hundred-fold. You even rob this room of its sanctity, by making it—an abode of saintly peace—into a scene of conflict. By the authority given me by your dead brother, just before he died ; by the authority which I possess as your spiritual guide and counsellor, I bid you struggle against a weakness unworthy of you, and get up ! I command you, Helena ! "

He knew his power over her ; he had not miscalculated the effect of his words. His severity, prompted by tenderest love, succeeded in controlling her, where all persuasion would have failed.

It gave her back what she had lost, her own proud self-possession, and, as if it were his indisputable right to command, and her, as indisputable, duty to obey, she rose instantly, laid her cheek for the last time against the cold cheek of her brother, and turned to leave the room. But, in the very act of doing so, she stood still, trembling from head to foot, raised her eyes to his imploringly as if beseeching him to forgive her, for though her will was conquered, her bodily strength failed, and she fell, for the second time insensible, into his outstretched arms.

Carrying her, as a man carries his most precious treasure, he took her upstairs to the room which she occupied with Rosa, and laid her upon a sofa. Then, before leaving her to the tender care of his mother, and her little fluttering, trembling friend, he stooped low over her, as if to contemplate once more her lovely face, every outline of which was graven on his heart, and murmured a few words, the purport of which his mother could not catch.

There were tears in his honest blue eyes when he raised them again, and one had fallen upon the pale sweet face of the senseless girl; but they were tears of devout and grateful happiness, for he knew now that his love—his first and only love—had obtained Heaven's sanction. He knew that she loved him, this matchless girl, as he had yearned to be loved. He knew, and thanked God for the knowledge, that no mortal could wean away her affections, or take her from him any more.

CHAPTER XXII

EDWIN'S FAREWELL

WHETHER the preparations for Edwin Drood's departure for Egypt occupied more time than he, in his first resolution to start at once, had considered necessary ; or whether poor Neville's death had caused them to be delayed, or whether, finally, anything else had interposed to retard them, were open questions. Certain it was, however, that Christmas had come and gone ; that the baby year had cast off its swaddling clothes and was beginning to " feel its legs," and assert its independence ; that, in a word, the first month of its existence was drawing to its end, and he was still in England. There were so many consultations to be had with Mr. Crisparkle, whose clear head and sound common-sense were invaluable to him ; there were visits to be paid, and good-byes to give and take, and congratulations to receive ; there were endless communications to be made to Rosa ; there were, in short, a thousand and one arguments to be taken advantage of, to delay that last fatal step of going away, and leaving her, perhaps for ever. For what chance, what possible chance, would remain to him, to win once more the girl whom he had trifled with and lost, when he was far away in that distant land ? And he loved her now with an intensity of passion, so intertwined with every fibre of his being, that to part from her without hope was like tearing the soul out of his body, and a mortal agony.

He had told her all the incidents of his rescue, and of the noble woman who had doubly saved him ; and she

had listened with sweet, sisterly interest, with pity for him, and admiration for her. With all her ready sympathy enlisted for the lonely girl, she had promised him to seek her out in London, and be a friend to her, for his sake. But when, animated by her ardour, and encouraged by her simple candour, he had ventured tremblingly to approach a step nearer, and try to disclose the real nature of his sentiments towards her, an invincible dread of losing, in the grasp for more, that sweet sisterly love which was so freely given him, froze the words upon his lips.

But the dreaded moment of departure could not be postponed for ever, and the time came when no excuse more was to be found for delay ; when everything was ready, and he must go. He had been spending the day in Minor Canon Corner, and now, as evening drew on, he rose to take a final leave. He would be for a few days in London, but this was his last visit to Cloisterham, before quitting it and his country, possibly never to return.

It had been a sad day to all of them, and no one wondered to see the tears shining brightly in Rosa's eyes, as he held out his hand to grasp hers. The china shepherdess was weeping too, and even Helena, whose own deep, deep sorrow had only rendered her more sympathising than before with the woes of others, turned aside her head to conceal one or two drops, which coursed slowly down her cheek.

"Rosa," he said, bending to her ear, "come out to the garden gate with me ; I have something to tell you—something I *must* say to you before I go ; and say to you alone."

It was the sudden impulse of the moment, the grasp of a drowning man at a straw. Before he submitted to his fate, and sank into an abyss of despair, he would make certain that nothing could have saved him. She turned pale, but followed him without a word.

It was touching to see—rent and torn as he was by

the vehement struggle within himself—how the giddy, thoughtless boy of a year ago, now thought for her. The air was keen and frosty out of doors, and he seized a hat and shawl which hung in the little hall, and placing the hat upon her head, wrapped the shawl closely round her. She was passive in his hands, letting him do as he would, and thus they went out together. The others remained behind. It was natural that these two, so closely connected from childhood, and who had both suffered so much from the same cause, should not be content with a formal leave-taking in the presence of others, but should wish to have a last word alone. So, even that stickler for propriety, the discreet china shepherdess, saw them pass through the gate into the Close, without uneasiness or surprise.

The sun was setting behind the house they had left in Minor Canon Corner, and the whole western sky was bright and glowing from its parting caress; but the east, towards which their faces were turned, had no share in this glory, and was sharp, cold and grey, while the wind, which had been easterly all day, came towards them, not with a rush, but slowly, as if malignantly determined to make the most of its opportunity, and nip them mercilessly.

“Rosa,” said the young man, passionately, bending down over her, “I cannot part from you like this—cannot, *cannot*. Have you no eyes to see that the sisterly affection you have offered me is either too much, or infinitely too little? Can you not understand that it is no mild, fraternal affection with which I regard you, but with that all-powerful, all-absorbing love, which a man only feels, only dares to feel, towards the woman he would make his wife?”

She tried to speak, but the words died away upon her lips, and she only shook her head sorrowfully.

“It is unmanly, ignoble, mean to urge you, is it not? I have said that to myself over and over again, and Heaven knows I meant to refrain. Heaven knows,

that up to this moment, I meant to refrain. But it has been too strong for me. It has carried me away with it. It is cruel to extort a promise from the woman one loves, and hamper her freedom. Heroes in books can be happy in giving up her whom they love to another ; but can men in real life, Rosa ? I think, then, they cannot love as I do. Oh, my darling, my darling ! give me a fragment of hope to take away with me ; only one fragment to sustain me for long weary years."

She could not speak yet, but her tears were falling, and her head was bent like that of some frail, fair flower, over which the storm wind rages.

" Let me earn your love, sweetest ! I do not deserve it yet, I know. The remembrance of the careless indifference with which I treated you, when I was a foolish boy who did not know your worth, is the bitterest drop in my cup of sorrow. Let me work for you, prove myself worthy of you, if that be possible ; serve for you seven years, or twice seven years, if need be, as Jacob served for Rachel."

Struggling hard to subdue her agitation, she pointed towards the east, and said in a low, broken voice, which grew calmer and more resolute as she proceeded :

" There is your path before you, Eddy—the plain path of duty ; and mine—mine lies now in a contrary direction. Be brave and patient, even though it must be trodden at first with bleeding feet ; and power to endure and even hope will surely come in time. We both of us have a cross to bear ; oh, brother, brother, I as well as you."

It was the first word she had uttered to show that the future before her appeared not quite so unclouded and bright as she would have had him believe. Strange to say, instead of depressing him, this avowal seemed to him like a faint hope of dawn.

" For the love of Heaven, Rosa," he exclaimed, " crush my hopes to death at once, or tell me if your

last words mean that I am not wholly indifferent—that it might—might be possible——”

“There is a spot,” she said, with a burning blush, and voice scarcely audible through her tears, “where East and West come together; perhaps—if God wills it—perhaps we may meet there in the years to come.”

Thus they separated, without further word or sign.

He passed away towards the East, cold and grey, and she went back into the house, behind which the sun was setting.

* * *

It was—in accordance with their earnest wish, notwithstanding the sympathetic joy in it of all Cloisterham—a very quiet wedding, that of the Revd. Septimus and Helena, celebrated about nine months after Neville's death; and yet the springs of peace and happiness in the hearts of both were so deep and clear, that mirth and gaiety would have been incongruous, and rather diminished than heightened their perfect bliss.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHERE EAST AND WEST COME TOGETHER

MORE than five years have come and gone since the Revd. Septimus and Helena plighted their troth together in the old Cathedral. Five springs, summers, autumns, winters—and spring again. May has come into the land—not pouting, wilful, changeable, boisterous, like so many of her predecessors and namesakes, who seem to have occupied their precious time in a constant effort to emulate the wild gambols of their elder brother, March, and were regular tomboys, wholly undeserving of their fame—but soft, sweet, smiling through gentle tears; clothed in bridal garments and lovely as a bride. The gardens in Cloisterham are fragrant with the breath of the lilac and jessamine, beautiful with the blossoms of the pear-tree and the apple, and a very glory to behold. The birds, intoxicated with love, sing impassioned songs to their brooding mates, and, animated by a spirit of gentle rivalry, seem each to strive to excel the others.

But no song of the birds, nor scent of the flowers, appears half so new and wonderful to the Minor Canon—though he sees it daily—as the lovely face of his wife, happy and smiling with pleasure, as she watches the gambols of their children. For two pair of little feet patter incessantly in the old house and in the old garden in Minor Canon Corner, and two rosy mouths chatter there the livelong day. The tears rise to his eyes as he looks at her and them, and wonders, as he has wondered many thousand times before, if ever man alive was half so happy and blessed as he. Every day since he and

she became one, he has learned—he thinks so—learned to love her better, honour her more, reverence her more completely as his better angel. And when the prattle of the children is hushed in sleep, and he stands beside their cots, with his wife's dear hand, clasped—ah, so tenderly!—in his, their soft breathing seems to him to sanctify the old, loved home, and make it more like heaven.

Grandmamma is a stationary guest in Minor Canon Corner, and (in confidence) she probably always will remain so. Yet there are times and seasons (particularly at such periods, when the more judicious love of the parents interposes a slight impediment to the unlimited spoiling of the laddies) when she declares it her irrevocable resolution to retire into some cottage in the neighbourhood and bury her diminished head there. She sometimes even goes so far as to insist on her Sept (the big one) taking immediate steps to bring about this catastrophe; for of course now that little Neville and little Sept have grown into such sturdy urchins, there oughtn't to be—and isn't—room for her any more. But this is a joke; she would pine to death without her darlings; and as for the children—why, the merest hint of a possibility that grandma ever could, or would, go away, is sure to elicit such heartrending and despairing howls, that she has more than enough to do to pacify them, forgetting, in so doing, her baleful intentions. Indeed, this threat, like the old imaginary rod, the only one in Minor Canon Corner, is, when judiciously made use of, never known to fail, as a corrective for the children. If first-born Neville (a child of earnest nature and strong passions) falls into a fit of childish rage, which sometimes still occurs, though the holy restraint of love is working wonderfully, the warning, that dear grandma's head cannot stand that, will check him instantly. If baby Sept, a born scapegrace, wanders beyond bounds, heedless of mamma's gentle command, the mere question—what would grand-

mamma say ? brings a flood of penitent tears, and an eager assurance of " never doing it again." The Revd. Septimus says on such occasions, or when reference is made to the cottage, that he can't afford, any way, to part with grandmamma, for she is worth her weight in gold, in bringing up the children. And Helena says nothing, only lays her soft arm round the old lady's neck, and rests her dark head upon her shoulder ; and it is noticeable that this silent appeal is more effective in silencing the china shepherdess, than any reasoning on the part of her son.

Mr. Sapsea is no longer Mayor of Cloisterham. His renown had never recovered the shock it had sustained, and his after-dinner fears had proved but too fatally prophetic. He was not re-elected.

The Nuns' House is also presided over by another than Miss Twinkleton, who has, in point of law, ceased to exist, for she has become Mrs. Sapsea.

She and her conjugal partner partake together of beef, backgammon and salad in the evening ; that is to say, when the lady chooses to do so. There is only one master in the ancestral home of the auctioneer, and that is not Mr. Sapsea. And though a vast deal of looking up takes place there daily, the devout worshipper is not Mrs. Sapsea, *née* Twinkleton. On the contrary, malignant tongues assert that she takes little trouble to disguise the fact that she looks *down* upon him. But she allows no one to imitate her example, and though the discipline with which she rules him is unbending and inexorable, she cares for his bodily wants, takes him out to walk with her, pours him out his allowance of wine, mixes his grog with judicious hand (not too strong), and performs her duty towards him—though rather as a stern mother than a wife. He is not unhappy on the whole, and has become, in a wonderfully short space of time, the meekest of the meek.

Only one thing seriously troubles him, to wit, that his wife has put her veto on his dressing like the Dean.

She is not going to let him make a fool of himself, she tells him, emphatically ; and when Mrs. Sapsea, *née* Twinkleton, speaks emphatically, no " young lady " in the Nuns' House was ever more easily quelled than he is now. He knows, by experience, how sharp and cutting are the twigs of that rod in pickle, and how dexterously and mercilessly Mrs. Sapsea, *née* Twinkleton, knows how to wield it. Yet, in spite of this, or, perhaps, in consequence of this, he considers, and looks up to, his wife as a most remarkable woman ; and so she is.

Mr. Tartar has not forgotten Rosa. The memory of her beauty, and the love he bore her, can never be blotted from his mind, and he cannot hear her name, or think of her without emotion, even yet. But he does not make her a topic of conversation with the charming little lady whom the world calls " Mrs. Tartar," and he calls " my wife." Upon this subject his mouth is closed, and it is just possible that the theme might fail to interest Mrs. Tartar, or interest her far too much. He prefers not to risk it, therefore. But his little daughter, who came into the world with the snowdrops, and now, in this bright May-time, is just three months old, bears the name of Rosa, added to that of her mother, because he thinks it the second prettiest name in the world ; and happy Mrs. Tartar little imagines how, once, he thought it far the prettiest. The old rapturous dream, the awakening from which caused him such bitter agony, has faded into a sweet and tender memory. Time has healed his wounds, as it heals the wounds of all.

Lobley's sole occupation and daily delight is to carry little Miss Tartar about in his brawny arms, sing her old wild sea songs, spin for her endless yarns (not one word of which she can understand) and pour out praises of the " Capting " into her unheeding ears. She exhibits at present (though Lobley prophesies no end of accomplishments for the future) only two faculties with any

degree of distinctness, viz., a remarkable aptitude for imbibing her natural nourishment, and a still more remarkable aptitude for rending the air with her cries.

Lobley considers these two performances as something almost supernatural, and signs of an unheard-of intelligence.

"Listen," he exclaims, delighted, holding up his hand to still all other sound which might impede his enjoyment, "that 'ere blessed leetle chicking is a piping again! Ain't it wonderful?"

Pretty Rosa's plan of living with her guardian, and keeping house for him as his little daughter, has been carried out long ago. Mr. Grewgious had chosen the sweetest little house in the most charming of neighbourhoods, and, assisted by Rosa, had furnished it to a miracle.

Among other necessary articles of furniture, there is the nicest of old ladies, who, in addition to being possessed of all the cardinal virtues, is stone-deaf. This is convenient, because they so often talk of Eddy in Egypt that, if she could hear, it might weary her. They wonder, in the evenings, whether he will ever pay them his promised visit. They wonder (Rosa, with rising tears in her eyes, which she wouldn't have her guardian see for the world) whether he thinks and talks of them as much as they do of him. They are sure he does not. Rosa is vehemently certain, he does not, and that it would be preposterous to think he did; of course, he has more important and more interesting matters to occupy his attention.

They discuss the probability of his bringing a wife with him. Mr. Grewgious, screwing up his eyes in the endeavour to ascertain if that is really a tear on Rosa's eyelash, is doubtful about this, and shakes his head. Rosa shakes her head, too, but only in vigorous denial of his unspoken thought. Of course the dear fellow will marry, and what a welcome they will prepare for the new sister! How dearly she will love her! Rosa is

conscious that her voice is unsteady, yet strives in vain to steady it. Mr. Grewgious thinks all women are enigmas, even his own little darling.

Rosa stirs the sluggish fire, addresses a few words to the deaf old lady on the sofa, who smiles and nods, although totally ignorant of their import, and they begin again to talk about his letters. What nice letters they were—simple, open-hearted, manly! Nothing on earth would have induced Rosa to hint that she thinks them a trifle cold, particularly that invariable ending, “Your affectionate brother, Edwin.”

She had bid him remain her brother, and now she is hurt, angry, mortified that he does her bidding. She had warned him to approach no nearer, and now her heart sinks low because he does not cast her warning to the wind. An enigma? She and all her sex? Yes, truly, not only to Mr. Grewgious, but to her own puzzled heart!

He is prospering in Egypt. They hear that, not from himself, but from other sources; he has risen every year higher in his profession, has become the mainstay of the firm, has largely increased its sphere of action, and is respected and looked up to on every hand.

He has proved himself a true, brave man to the backbone, and, in so far, fulfilled his promise of showing himself worthy of a woman’s love.

But he has given no sign. Not one. Surely, surely, if it had been for love of her, he *would* not, and *could* not sign himself for five long years, “Your affectionate brother.” That had been a passing dream, and he had awakened, in the distant land, to other hopes, and other desires.

Yet this reticence does not repulse, but draws her heart to him, as powerfully, as irresistibly as a magnet attracts iron. No passionate pleading could have gained her love as surely as this.

The deaf old lady, whose eyes have been fixed longingly on the clock for the last quarter of an hour,

risers at the moment when the hands point to ten, kisses Rosa good-night, curtseys Mr. Grewgious a parting salute, and retires to bed.

Rosa throws her arms round her guardian's neck, rising on tiptoe to do it, rests her bright head one moment on his faithful breast, then kisses him a dozen times, and, taking her candle, follows the old lady's example. Mr. Grewgious, glorified by the kisses, remains behind with a radiant face.

Presently, still smiling, but thoughtful, too, he begins softly to pace up and down the pleasant room, filled with a hundred tokens of its sunbeam.

There, on a chair in the corner, lies a tiny glove, and, dangling by its ribbons, a broad-brimmed garden hat. On the work-table in the bay window stands her work-basket still, filled to the brim and running over, with sewing for the poor children whom she has hunted up; and, on the floor, lies her thimble. The book in which she has been reading reposes on its face, where she threw it down, on hearing his well-known footstep, to run and meet him.

The piano is still open, with the notes upon it of the song which her sweet voice sang to him that evening. Little, heedless, careless thing! He must take her to task. Point out to her the beauty of order. Seriously take her to task.

He says he will, but he knows he will not. In his office reigns an order, complete and perfect. A scrap of paper in the wrong place, a bit of tape upon the floor, would worry him to death there. His clerks know him for an indulgent master in all other respects, but in this he is stiff-backed and hard as iron.

Yet here, in this room, he would not have it different. No room, swept and garnished, could be half so pleasant to him, as this one, all alive with her memory. Her pretty carelessness, her dainty disorder, is a thousand times sweeter to him than the most supreme carefulness of another.

And yet—and yet! He only has the treasure entrusted to him, to guard it for the real owner, when he comes to claim it. He knows that; he would not have it otherwise. He *would not* have it otherwise! When its preciousness is most apparent to him, and he values it at its highest, he says that to himself with an unflinching voice.

Many have coveted and stretched out eager hands to take it, but Mr. Right (as Mr. Grewgious says jokingly) was not among them. Till *he* comes, he will guard it. When *he* comes, he will give it up with a joyful heart, and be happy in the consciousness of having done his duty, and kept the treasure bright.

He has taken her with him to the opera, the theatre, and other places of amusement, in the winter; hearing nothing of the music, seeing nothing of the acting, or the gay throng around, for delight in her delight; and finding pleasure and joy enough in the sight of her brightening face.

He has taken her with him to the sea-side in the summer, or among the mountains, suffering martyrdom in boats, or upon the backs of stubborn mules, yet more than repaid, when her silvery laugh rang out clear and untroubled. To make her happy—he is happy to know it—is his daily thought, his daily endeavour.

At last, he, too, goes to bed, treading softly not to disturb her slumbers, and troubled somewhat still with the fear, which his short-sighted eyes had not been able to settle definitely, that that had been a tear upon her eyelash.

But Rosa is not slumbering. Her candle is out, and her room dark and quiet, yet the thought of Eddy is with her in the solitude, and though her head rests upon the pillow, she is thinking of him still—wondering still, if those last foolish words of hers were understood by him: “Where East and West come together.” She would die of shame if she did feel sure that they were long forgotten. Why can she not forget him, as she

has forgotten others? Is this *love*—this yearning longing to see him once more, touch him, hear his voice? If he should call her—only write, “Rosa, come,” she would—she knew she would—hasten on foot, if need be, to go to him at his bidding. But he does not want her any more; she has expected too much from him, and has lost all. Otherwise he would have given some sign all these long years. Oh, why has she learned to comprehend her own heart, too late! Oh, Eddy, Eddy, Eddy!

The last letter from Egypt had been written a long time back, and even this comfort seems likely to be taken from her. As day after day goes by, and no news comes, she tries to brace herself for a still further trial, and not even Mr. Grewgious guesses what the effort costs her. Her high courage rises to the cruel task of struggling against a passionate longing, and she will not yield an inch. Thousands of men and women live and are happy without *that* love, and so will she.

One morning, when May is far advanced, and through the open windows, leading on to the lawn, sloping gently towards the river, came the heavy perfumes of the lilac and the jessamine, syringa and hawthorn, she is startled out of a little reverie by the entrance of a maid, announcing a visitor.

The old lady is snoozing peacefully on the sofa, dreaming, perhaps, of the days when she too was young, and Mr. Grewgious is absent at his office, in Staple Inn. Rosa bids the maid show the visitor into the room adjoining.

“A gentleman, Susan? Did he ask for me?”

“Yes, miss. For master, first; and when I said he was not at home, for Miss Bud.”

With the natural wish of a woman, old or young, to appear to the best possible advantage before a member of the opposite sex, Rosa, with innocent and unconscious coquetry, smoothes her glossy hair, shakes out the folds of her simple muslin dress, and re-arranges the ribbon

on her bosom ; then, with a soft step, she opens the door of the next room—the sedate little mistress of the house—to welcome the visitor.

She catches a glimpse of a manly, tall, upright form, as yet unconscious of her presence, standing looking out into the pretty garden, and on the green soft lawn, dotted with flower beds, and shaded by trees, clothed in the first freshness of the summer. Perhaps, oh, perhaps, he is the bearer of news from Eddy !

He had heard her footfall, and turns to greet her. Her grave salute is arrested as she returns his look, her heart begins to beat rapidly, her cheeks pale, and she stands still trembling. For, changed as he is once more, she knows her brother—more dearly loved than any brother—and she knows not his mission. Oh, Eddy, Eddy, Eddy !

Not one word issues from her trembling lips, and not one word from his. He is as agitated as she. She sees how eagerly and anxiously he scans her face, how searchingly he tries to penetrate to her thoughts, if that be possible—sees it through her gathering tears. Then he opens his arms wide to receive her, and she goes into his embrace, as a weary wanderer, long outcast in foreign lands, and sick with longing for the Fatherland, enters into his home.

They have been sitting together for a short time, silent with a rapturous silence more eloquent than any words, when Rosa at last, with a sigh of deep content, raises her head from its resting-place.

Through the open window come the sweet sounds and scents from the garden, beautiful with the untarnished brightness and glory of the spring. The insects hum, the birds twitter and sing, the water bubbles and murmurs, and all seem to the two within to be talking of nothing but love.

A little spaniel—Rosa's pet—comes barking into the room, full of indignation against the usurper ; but even he cannot withstand the prevailing influence, grows

amicable and friendly, and after sniffing round the stranger, crouches down satisfied at his feet. Rosa laughs as she pats him.

"Ah, poor Netta! Your nose is out of joint, my pet, but you must live and bear it." Then, glancing shyly at her lover: "How handsome you have grown, Eddy, dear!"

"Don't say that, my darling, or I must return the compliment, and if I once begin in that line, I'm afraid I shall never stop, and you wouldn't like it."

"No, don't Eddy! But (nestling closer to him) *I am* glad that you like me."

"And I am glad, my precious, so devoutly thankful, that you like me."

"I *do* like you, Eddy."

He stoops down to thank her, with a fervent kiss. As his eyes rest upon her lovely face, flushed with happiness, he records a solemn vow to devote his life to make her happy, and prove to her how he values her love.

"No, Eddy, dear. Love me as much as you can, for I am quite insatiable for that; but don't spoil me or pet me too much. Scold me when I deserve it. Put me down when I forget my place. Help me to be good, for I am weak, and want a strong hand to check and guide me. Be sure, Eddy, that I shall not love you one bit the less if your hand be firm as well as kind."

For answer, he clasps her to his heart, and holds her there with a passionate pressure. They are silent for a space again. His heart is too full of fervent gratitude to speak. The long years of working and waiting appear as nothing when weighed against the supreme happiness of this moment.

"Eddy," says Rosa, raising her face wistfully, "will you tell me something?"

"If I can, my own!"

"Did you ever try to guess, Eddy, who it was who saved me?"

"Saved you, Rosa?"

"Saved me from drowning, Eddy, when, but for him, I should have perished miserably. When, but for his noble self-forgetfulness, I should have died in the arms of——" She stops, shuddering.

"I have never tried to guess, my sweet."

She looks at him eagerly and enquiringly, with a flush, almost of impatience, on her face. His eyes sink beneath her searching gaze, not with shame, but with a proud delight.

"Because you knew, Eddy. Because I know you know. Oh, tell me, tell me."

"Darling, it was I."

"I was sure of it," she says, with a flushing face "All the time I was ill I seemed to know it; yet when I came to myself I thought (how could I think otherwise?) that it was a phantom of my imagination. When you were found, it came back to me again, with more certainty than ever, but I was ashamed to speak, because you were silent. Why were you silent, Eddy?"

"My darling, I would not have had you know *then* for all that earth could give me; no, not even to win you, yourself. I would not have advanced a claim upon you, or striven to purchase, as it were, the blessing of your love, which, unspeakably as I longed for it, I could and would only accept as a free gift. I knew your generous heart, my Rosa! I feared a noble self-sacrifice. The thought that it might be *that*, and not love, would have been a source of misery. And, besides, it was purest accident, or rather the boundless mercy of God, which led me to the spot in time."

"Oh, I love you, I love you, Eddy!"

He clasps her to his heart again. Then they sit silent once more, until he speaks at last, in answer to her questioning look.

"Yes, my precious! you have a right to know now, and you shall. I had long feared and watched, on your

account, that miserable man. I tracked him on the road to Cloisterham, and followed him, dreading that his mission there meant danger to you. But he was fleet of foot than I, and distanced me. Nevertheless, I went on to the city, and meeting some whom I had known, and who regarded me, as I fancied, with suspicious looks, I grew alarmed on my own account, and, terrified at the thought of detection, went down to the river, wandering along its bank until I was far away again. I thought of you, and of the times we had walked there together, and forgot time and all else in the bitter sorrow at the remembrance of how I had trifled with your affection. On my return, I heard a splash in the water, and a cry for help. I did not know whom I was going to save, when I sprang in."

"My noble Eddy!" She can scarce say it through her tears.

"So you see, my bird! (he draws her closer to him as he speaks) that you have no reason to feel grateful to me at all, for I did not know that it was you. It was well I did not! for when I found out whose bright hair I was twining round my hand, when I saw your loved face, cold and still in the moonlight, though I strove hard to strike out for the shore, my feelings overcame me, and I lost consciousness. So it was Mr. Crisparkle who saved you, and not I."

"He, too," she says, "and I am grateful to him; but for all your trying to pretend it wasn't, it was you also: and I am so glad to be alive—so glad to know, Eddy, what happiness really means—so glad to be able to give you back my life, until I die."

Mr. Grewgious misses the waiting little figure at the door when he comes home, and is surprised to find himself only admitted by the maid, whose triumphant yet commiserating face "speaks volumes." But when he enters the drawing-room to look for her, he understands the cause. They are still sitting, hand in hand, together. For a moment a shadow, like a mist, blots

them out from the old man's gaze ; then the sun of a pure, unselfish affection swallows it up, and he comes forward gently to lay his hands in blessing on the head of the son whom he has found, and the daughter (he sees it in her loving eyes) whom he will never lose, for Mr. Right has come at last, and All is right.

THE END



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